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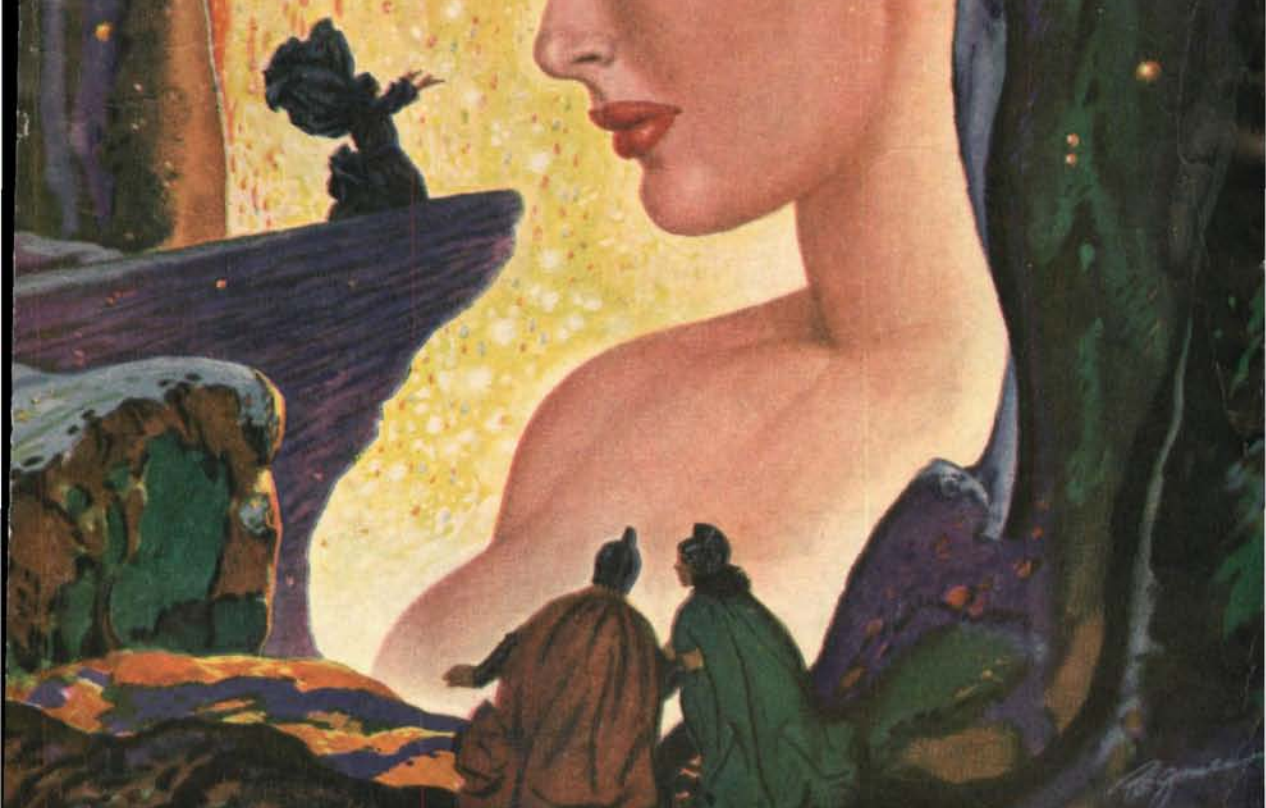
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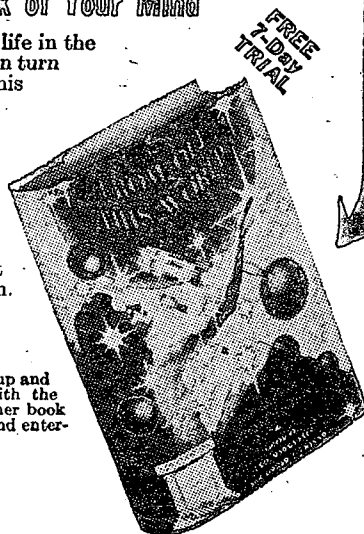
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CONTENTS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE GREATEST WRITERS IN SCIENCE FICTION FROM OFF THIS WORLD

BOOK 1

The Last Woman by Thomas G. Gardner
The Man Who Evolved by Edmond Hamilton
The World Without by Benson Herbert
The Green Torture by Rowley Hilliard
The Literary Corkscrew by David H. Keller, M.D.
The Man from Mars by F. Schuyler Miller
The Ancient Brain by A. G. Strangland
The City of Singing Flame by Clark Ashton Smith
Beyond the Singing Flame by Clark Ashton Smith

BOOK 2

The Eternal Man by D. D. Sharp
Hornets of Space by H. P. Starzl
The Cubic City by Louis D. Tucker
A Martian Odyssey by Stanley G. Weinbaum
Valley of Dreams by Stanley G. Weinbaum
Through the Purple Cloud by Jack Williamson
The Microscopic Giants by Paul Ernst
When the Earth Lived by Henry Kuttner
Conquest of Life by Eando Binder

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THE OBSERVATORY By The Editor	6
INTO EXILE By Salem Lane	35
WITHOUT INCIDENT By Leslie Phelps	59
BEFORE THE CRO-MAGNON By Ed. Kelly	104
THE FINAL STALEMATE By Charles Recour	105
THE STEAMING AUTO WORLD By Ralph Ortiz	105
HELI-CAB HACK By John Weston	146
HOMESICKNESS By A. T. Kedzie	147
THE UNIVERSAL BRAIN By Lynn Standish	147
RUNAWAY By Ramsey Sinclair	164
THE SUPER POLICE STATE By June Lurie	165
WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE By W. R. Chase	165
THE CLUB HOUSE By Rog Phillips	176
FREEDOM FROM THINKING By Milton Matthew	181
THE READER'S FORUM By The Readers	182
WHAT LIES AHEAD By Sandy Miller	189
WRONG ANSWER By Carter T. Wainwright	190
THE TOMB TAPPERS By Leo Brady	191



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— *All* STORIES *Complete* —

GODDESS OF THE VOLCANO (Novel—17,000)	by Craig Browning	8
Illustrated by Julian Krupa		
MY BROTHER'S KEEPER (Short—5,700)	by Alfred Coppel	36
Illustrated by Edmond B. Swiatek		
THE GLOVES OF GINO (Short—8,500)	by P. F. Costello	44
Illustrated by Leo Ramon Summers		
WORLD WITHOUT MEN (Novel—15,000)	by Robert Moore Williams	60
Illustrated by Henry E. Sharp		
"IF YOU WERE ME . . ." (Novel—11,000)	by Rog Phillips	86
Illustrated by Henry E. Sharp		
THE MOON PIRATES (Short—9,000)	by Frances M. Deegan	106
Illustrated by Julian Krupa		
READ IT AND WEEP! (Short—6,700)	by Peter Worth	124
Illustrated by Edmond B. Swiatek		
TOWER OF BABBLE (Short—5,000)	by Robert Abernathy	136
Illustrated by Edmond B. Swiatek		
TIME OF MY LIFE (Short—8,500)	by Gerald Vance	148
Illustrated by Julian Krupa		
THE ISLAND OUT OF SPACE (Short—5,000)	by August Derleth	166
Illustrated by Joe Tillotson		

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The

OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

THE "Reader's Forum" this month contains a lengthy and rather pungent letter from Edward John, of San Francisco. Parts of it succeed in putting the finger squarely and painfully on at least two of this editor's recently acquired sore spots. Reply is made here at the front of the magazine for two reasons: to keep from filling the space allotted to the "Forum", and to make certain the people it's aimed at won't overlook what we have to say.

IN HIS second paragraph, Mr. John writes: "The future of science fiction is indeed dim, unless authors are found with some real imagination...." To this your editor adds a fervent "amen!" After less than seven months of editing the two leading science-fiction and fantasy magazines on the newsstands today, we are becoming increasingly aware of the paucity of outstanding stories in those fields. It is unfortunate indeed that in a period when sf is enjoying the greatest popularity in its history, readers are being given, by and large, the shoddiest kind of material imaginable.

DAY after day we see the same threadbare plots and uninspired writing in the manuscripts that cross our desk. A staggering percentage of them start something like this: "Professor Glurp looked up from the intricate machine as his young assistant entered the laboratory. 'You're just in time, Timpkins!' he exclaimed triumphantly. 'I've finally succeeded in flaming the isotope, thereby making Time travel possible!'" Whereupon, for the next 5,000 to 50,000 words, the professor and his assistant (who is in love with Lymphadea, the prof's bewitching young daughter) go tearing around through Time, fighting the Orbays, who came from Outer Space and took over Earth (invariably called Terra) around 3279 A. D. The prof saves the assistant, the assistant saves the daughter, the daughter saves her honor... and ho hum.

CERTAINLY there have been engrossing yarns built on such a pattern. But when we—and you!—have waded through it 427 times, a certain weariness is bound to set in.

AND THEN there's the monstrosity that goes something like this: "I awoke suddenly from a sound sleep. In the faint light from my window I saw somebody—no!—something! Cold perspiration bathed my shaking body and the very roots of my hair tingled. Before I could recover from my momentary paralysis, a somber voice spoke in my mind." Personally we've never been able to get far enough into the story to find out what that "somber" voice said, since it's difficult to read while you're yawning. But you'd be horrified to learn how many stories we get every day that open almost exactly that way.

OR LIKE this: "Commander Phineas Capar stood in the control room of the spaceship Zymosis MMCIX as it approached the strange and forbidding surface of the dark planet. Already the gravigrids were slowing the ship to a mere 327,946,213 miles per second, and Capar fingered the atomblaster at his belt in anticipation of the battles he must face before he could hope to rescue the fair Illynya Glutz, at present held captive in some subterranean fastness of this desolate world." Stop the ship, Phineas, old boy; we're getting off right here in space!

ONE MORE and we'll cut this out: "A blast from a *zenox* almost struck Rick as he dropped behind a *lsnft* for protection. Through the clouds of *pzroyt* he could make out the dim shapes of three Martians, wearing robes of *qrlem*, which meant they were members of the royal house of *Zilch*." By this time we're aware that here's a story whipped out by one of these "authors" who thinks all you need is a lot of wild combinations of letters and—presto!—the true flavor of science-fiction. If *that's* the true flavor, brother—we'll take vanilla!

BELIEVE us, these examples are not exaggerated. Nor do such stories come only from amateur writers. The professional is in there too, far more often than he has any right to be. And while the nail holes in his work have been filled in and the joints hidden under two coats of varnish, the same bone-weary plot is hiding behind the gloss.

(Continued On Page 188)

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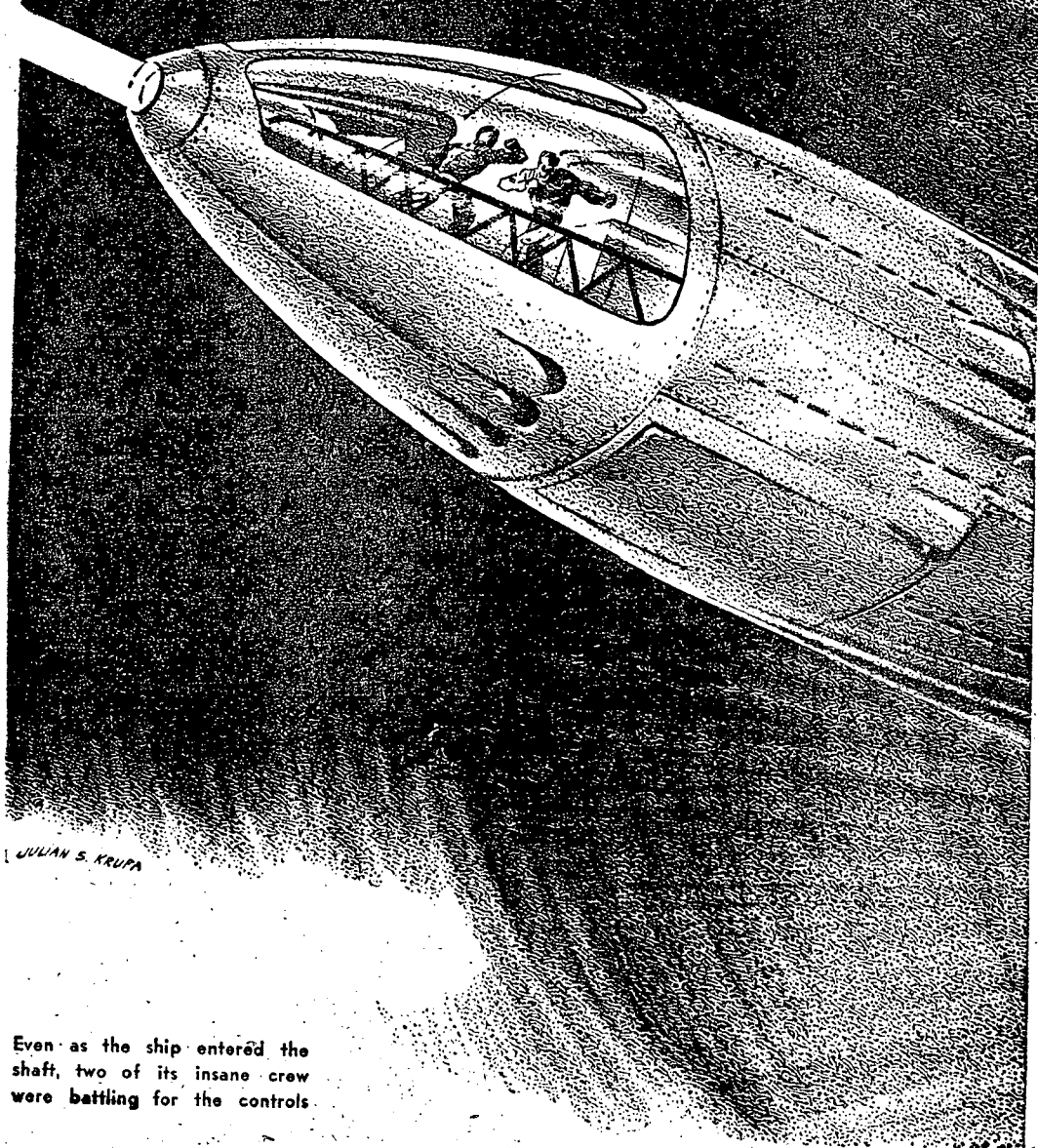
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GODDESS of the VOLCANO



JULIAN S. KRUPA

Even as the ship entered the
shaft, two of its insane crew
were battling for the controls.



By Craig Browning

**What weird power enabled this planet
not only to gain control of a space-ship
but to plunge the passengers into madness?**

PAUL CROUCHED, legs spread
and bent, arms curved, waiting.

His mad eyes glared at the two
approaching figures. His lips, cracked
and bruised, opened in preparation for
the deep gulps of air he would soon
need in the effort to get away.

In contrast to the two so calmly
coming down the corridor toward him,
he was a hairy brute, a throwback to
man's ancestors. His ten-day growth
of beard was more like animal fur

than the adornment of a human face. His matted hair, uncombed for as many days, was worse, for animals have a sense of neatness.

For Paul was mad—insane. In his mind was only the cunning, the emotions, and the thoughts of a mad animal; the elements of memory and reason that had made him captain of Polaris III were as far from access to his mad awareness as if they had no existence.

But for all that he was a human being. And the two calm figures approaching him so inexorably and so calmly were robots.

A cunning light appeared in his eyes. He knew a trick or two that could be used on robots. In his younger days, ten years ago when he was twenty, he had been a star wrestler in college.

The two robots were only a few steps away now. They were smiling apologetically, their fleshlike features so exactly duplicating the human that one who didn't know might think they were living beings rather than automatons.

Paul let out a groan and dropped to his hands and knees, simulating collapse. His matted head was down, but his eyes were watching for the feet and legs of the robots to come into view.

They did, pausing. Without looking, he knew they were starting to bend over him to lift him up.

He shot out his hands and seized two ankles, pulling them toward him. One of the robots fell. Instantly Paul was on his feet in a swift sprint, his shoulder catching the other robot in the rib area.

He was past them, out of the dead end of the corridor, with the whole ship to flee through. He hesitated, debating whether he should kill himself with some weapon now, or wait a while longer. It was risky to wait. If

the robots caught him they would tie him down, keep him alive, not let him die.

But before he died he wanted to be with Myra for a few wonderful hours. Myra whom he had yearned for with every atom of his body since he went berserk. Myra with her curved, warm body. It would be risky. He might be caught and kept from dying. Would it be worth it?

The sound of rapid footsteps decided him. The two robots had recovered and were after him again. He would have to find a stateroom and lock himself in—and it might as well be the one Myra was in, asleep these last five years in suspended animation.

He ran again, his shoulders taking the blows when he bounced against the metal walls of the corridor. A sleeve ripped. Blood stained the skin of his arm where it had bruised and broken.

His wild, wide eyes were searching for a number now. The soft smoky white of door after door invited him. He passed each by until suddenly the number three, gracefully formed, appeared at eye height in the center of one.

This was it. He threw a hand against the door frame to aid his abrupt stop. The two robots were only yards away. It would take luck. His hand closed over the knob, twisting and pushing in one motion.

The door flew open. He was through, turning, slamming it shut, searching for and finding the sliding bolt, putting the full weight of his body into getting the door closed. The loud slam triggered his wrist. The bolt shot home a split second before the two robots leaped against the door.

Paul sank to the floor, his breathing coming in loud, animal throat noises, his chest against the door, his matted wild head turned so that a hairy cheek rested against the panel.

For a minute, two minutes, he rested, panting. Then he sat up and turned to look across the room at Myra.

HER CALM eyes returned his stare as those of a tame deer might regard the stare of a stranger that seemed to threaten no harm. Behind her large blue eyes lay no recognition, or anything else other than mild awareness. In every discernible way she was no more than a deer—perhaps less, for her consciousness and higher mental faculties were in suspended animation, leaving only the habit patterns that could take care of the daily needs of her body.

Paul neither knew this, nor would have cared one way or another. Forgotten were the two robots outside the door. Forgotten even was the desire for the escape of death. There was nothing in reality for him at this moment other than the female across the room.

Without taking his eyes from her, he rose slowly to his feet. His breathing was the only sound in the room, rasping, a terrifying noise more suited to the night jungles of Africa.

The eyes of Myra watched him, unafraid, uncomprehending. That body, so beautifully formed and so relaxed, slid across the rayon covering of the wide, foam rubber mattress. The feet slipped down to plant themselves on the carpeted floor.

Her body rose to sitting position in preparation for rising. Paul took a step toward her. Another. His lungs were bellows, forcing air through his raw windpipe. A vein at his temple throbbed visibly. His dirt-grimed fingers opened and closed in slow spasms of unconscious anticipation.

To the animal rasping of his breathing was now added a low sobbing noise, as though the finer part of his nature, walled off by the horrible madness that possessed him and unable to

prevent what it saw was about to happen, were at least able to express its shame and sorrow and helplessness.

He paused above her, saliva wetting the mat of hair on his chin, his once gleaming but now film-encrusted teeth showing through open lips like gray fangs.

His hand reached toward her, took the strap of her gown, pulled it over her round shoulder. Her own hand reached up and slid the other strap. Her gown slid free, falling to her waist. She completed the act of disrobing. It was automatic. It had been started by the trigger signal of sliding off one shoulder strap.

The firm white contours of her body, unmasked, were exposed to the glaring, red-veined eyes that looked down.

Paul's hand, its grime heightened by the contrast of her clean white skin, flattened against her, pushing her back and down. She relaxed, unalarmed by this variation of the routine habit patterns of five years, her powers of reason that could have plucked meaning from this thing fast asleep.

He bent over her lax figure, saliva dripping from his bestial lips to spatter on her spotless flesh. His matted head hid hers as his lips sought hers and crushed them mercilessly.

Some dim instinct of sex caused her white, unclothed arms to circle his neck, staining it with the grim of his torn officer's coat.

WITHOUT warning, an unseen hand seemed to pluck up the two figures, hold them suspended above the white nylon of the bed, then fling them violently across the room.

They hit the wall with him cushioning her fall. They dropped to the floor.

Myra rose unsteadily to her feet. Her calm eyes looked down at the lax, sprawling beast. The matted head lay

at a queer angle, motionless.

She turned and crossed the room to the shower stall. Her weight on the floor in front of its door opened it. She stepped inside. Her presence there started the shower.

Soapy hot water cascaded down her body, foaming in cleansing action. It was followed by clear water that washed the soap away. This stopped, and warm air whirled around her with its drying effect.

The shower door opened again. Myra stepped out, crossed to the bed, put on her gown, and lay down. There was no part of her consciousness to trouble over the strange variation to the norm of existence. The slipping of a shoulderstrap had begun a routine that she had finished with unthinking routine habit. It was done. There was nothing now except to relax, motionless; until such time as she was fed.

Paul's figure sprawled in unconsciousness where it had fallen. At the back of his head a spreading blot of glistening red reflected the light.

"I THINK now we had better waken one of the other humans," Duf said, relaxing his futile pressure against the bolted door.

"That takes time," Ram objected.

"So would anything else," Duf said, smiling politely at his fellow robot. The smile was automatic, a part of the built-in expression patterns of his plastimuscule complex. But behind the polite, unruffled exteriors of both robots were minds that fully recognized the urgency of things. "Get the drenal," Duf ordered. "I'll look at the chart and make sure which is next in line for waking."

Ram nodded and hurried off. Duf went to a chart in a framed section of the corridor wall. There were eight names listed there. After each name was a succession of letters, each letter in a small square, graphlike. The list

neatly typed, read as follows:

File: Colonization; Polaris; Departed from Earth February twentieth, twenty-three twenty-five A.D.. Eight members:-

1. Paul Freeman; physicist.
2. Fred Davis; biochemist and surgeon.
3. Arthur Graham; industrial engineer.
4. Charles Laney; technician.
5. Gertrude Minor; botanist.
6. Myra Peters; language and music.
7. Grace Stevens; genetics and archeology.
8. Lila Adams; physician.

Duf's finger went to a succession of O's longer than any other, and followed it to the left to the name on that line. Fred Davis was next in line for waking. He had two years to go yet, but this was a grave emergency.

Duf nodded to himself in satisfaction. He liked Fred. The man treated him as a fellow being rather than an automaton. He possessed a sympathetic insight that penetrated the exterior and understood what went on underneath.

Fred Davis had told him something once that Duf had never forgotten.

"Duf," he had said, "A mind is more than just the functioning of a material vehicle of thought. My mind may be the functioning of an organic brain, while yours is the functioning of an inorganic brain; but our minds are the same in nature, each existing on the same high plane of reality regardless of what's underneath."

Duf nodded his satisfaction with things. Fred Davis was the one to waken.

Ram came back carrying the black case. Duf went to meet him. They went to the door with a numeral seven on it and opened it.

Inside, a man lying outstretched on the rayon-sheeted bed turned his head, his eyes taking in the two arrivals with no expression showing on his features. There was no recognition, no curiosity. There was, rather, a patient waiting for some signalling action of the two robots that would start a habit pattern

to unwinding within the numbed brain.

Duf crossed to the bed and sat down on its edge. He pushed Fred Davis down on his back gently, and pulled his right arm out away from his body, pinioning the shoulder and wrist so the arm would remain still.

Ram opened the black case and took out a hypodermic needle and small glass tube filled with a yellowish fluid. He placed the glass tube in the framework of the needle, held it up and pressed gently on the plunger until a small drop of the fluid stood on the end of the hollow needle.

Then he bent over and jabbed the needle in the inert arm, shoving the plunger down slowly until the glass tube was empty. He extracted the needle, placed it back in the black case and closed the lid. Both robots stood quietly, waiting for the intellect behind those placid blue eyes to waken under the action of the injected fluid.

The robots were tense, wary. Sometimes in the first few seconds of waking the emotions were out of control. Then it was necessary to hold the person down until full consciousness emerged.

Suddenly there was a twitch of a face muscle. A new light appeared in the eyes. The visual centers had connected to consciousness. The waking mind was receiving visual impressions.

It was the crucial instant, the doubtful one.

Suddenly an unseen hand seemed to pluck the two robots and the man into the air, hold them motionless for a brief instant, then rush them across the room against the far wall.

Fred Davis's fall was cushioned against the yielding bodies of the two robots. The three fell in a protesting heap to the floor,

FRED'S first waking realization was that he was hurtling across the room toward the far wall from his

bed. Every impression before that had been subliminal—at the threshold of conscious awareness.

As the wall rushed toward him his hands and legs went out to meet its impending blow. His mind, from a dead start, as gathering in the strands of knowledge and reason, and putting them together in an attempt to learn what was happening.

The normal gravity of the ship was produced by the spin of the ship on its center axis; maintained by the gyro stabilizer. The direction of the fall, almost parallel with the floor, and its suddenness, and also its constancy, were not consistent with a hit from a striking meteor.

As his body met the wall the startling conclusion rushed into his mind that the only thing which could explain this was a sudden strong induction field in space that acted on the spinning ship like the stator of a motor acts on the rotor.

And as he slid down the wall to the floor under the normal centrifugal force of the ship's spin, another and—as he was to find—mistaken, conclusion hit him. Whatever it was, the robots had wakened him to deal with it.

What could it be, ten parsecs out in space from the Solar System?

He picked himself up off the floor. The two robots lay motionless. Probably the fall had broken the filaments of some of their electron valves. They would have to be connected to the analyzer later and the trouble found.

But right now there wasn't time. Whatever was happening, he would have to find out its potentialities at once and prepare to cope with whatever danger might exist.

Briefly he wondered who was in charge now. Whoever it was was certainly in the control center—probably working his or her head off.

He left the two robots laying where they had fallen. Opening the door, he stepped into the hall. He made his way along the corridor until he came to an elevator.

He entered it. The door closed. He rose swiftly toward the central hub of the ship. When the elevator stopped and the door opened, he stepped into a corridor from which steps led still further upward.

Here his weight was greatly diminished. With each step upward his weight became less and less. His reflexes, from past habit, altered to fit the lesser centrifugal effects.

At the top of the stairs he opened a doorlike hatch cover that, when closed, hermetically sealed the compartment bulkhead. In the circular room he entered were panel after panel of instruments. This was the heart of the ship's mechanism.

His eyebrows lifted in surprise. No one was here. He looked around swiftly, thinking perhaps whoever should be here might be lying somewhere unconscious. The room was empty.

No time to puzzle that out. He jumped to the radar table and examined the panorama of the heavens. What he saw brought a grunt of unbelief.

He shook his head and sprang to the direct telescope to look. Direct view only confirmed what he had seen through radar. Less than a million miles away was a huge, totally dark sphere, its diameter an incredible million and a quarter miles!

He sprang to the automatic navigator and read its data with feverish haste. Surface gravity of object, twenty thousand times that of the Earth. Present trajectory, intersecting surface of object in five hours plus. Power required to set non-intersecting trajectory, nine million pounds of thrust for five hours plus—which was four times the maximum thrust of the

colossal space-ship's plates!

There would be no atmosphere to this huge dark body. Even hydrogen would liquify at normal temperatures under the terrible gravity drag, and the surface temperature of this body must be far below that.

Fantastic! Here, a fifth of the distance to Polaris from Earth, was a heavenly body larger than the Sun, yet cold. Not hot like the solar Sun. Its existence had not been dreamed of. The autopilot hadn't been constructed to compensate for such an eventuality.

He half rose, giving the figures on the autonavigator a last look. What he saw made him sink back into the seat again. The co-ordinates of intersection of the trajectory with the body's surface—in other words the point at which they would crash—was shifting.

It should shift, since the thrust plates were working at full capacity; but the figures were going the exact opposite of what they should. The trajectory was slowly altering toward a direct drop.

COULD it be that the attraction of the body was so great that the autonavigator instruments were measuring it incorrectly? He flicked the toggle for an analysis of the components of acceleration covering the past twenty-four hours.

The typer ticked out the details. He read them as fast as they came into view on the tape. They told a queer story, if they were right.

The autonavigator had detected the body long before that. It had plotted a course that would carry the ship safely past it. Up until half an hour ago that course had been adhered to.

The factors of external forces and ship forces were carefully countered against each other. Everything was accounted for. Then a little less than half an hour before, there had been a strange external action on the ship that

came out as a magnetic moment plus a gravitational vector imposed for twenty seconds.

That impossible combination had come about the time he awoke to find himself sailing across the room down below.

"Then—" Fred Davis said to himself. He paused in surprise. "That couldn't have been why Duf and Ram woke me!"

He glanced at the autonavigator again. There were now about four hours until the instant of crashing oblivion. The changing point of crash was bringing the instant closer and closer.

There was hardly much use in trying to find out what had been the reason for the two robots to waken him, but—he smiled sourly—it would at least give his mind something to occupy itself with until the end.

The instruments were working properly. There was nothing that human hands could do to avert the crash.

Fred stood up and shoved in the direction of the door. A moment later he was descending the stairs to the head of the elevator, feeling the gravitational simulation of the ship's centrifugal force take hold.

When he reached his room he found the two robots still slumped where he had left them. He picked up one of them, slinging him over his shoulder, and staggered down the corridor to its end where it opened onto the maze of testing laboratories.

Twenty minutes later Duf opened his eyes and looked up at the quiet, concentrated expression on Fred's face, and smiled.

"What caused us to fly across the room, Fred?" he asked with complete casualness.

"That can wait," Fred avoided. "Why did you wake me?"

"Oh!" Duf said in sudden recol-

lection. "Paul has gone insane. We tried to capture him but couldn't. He's bolted himself in number three, Myra's room."

"Insane?" Fred asked blankly. "What caused it? Loneliness?"

"I think not," Duf said calmly. "It happened ten days ago. I think it's due to something peculiar about the space we're travelling through. Both Ram and myself have noticed a strangeness about our own thoughts, dating from the same time."

"You mean insanity?" Fred prompted.

"Not exactly," Duf said, sitting up on the table where he lay. "It's more analogous to interference of the imagination with orderly thought processes."

"Ah ha!" Fred said meaningfully. "The Johnson effect!"

"The what?" Duf asked.

"Johnson," Fred explained hastily, "discovered in 2204 that certain radiations could trigger brain cells and cause them to act as though excited by neural process. In ordinary thinking certain thoughts call up certain sequences of thought. The Johnson effect produced thoughts in consciousness that didn't follow this law. It was similar in results to previous experiments, performed as early as the first half of the twentieth century, in which a fine copper filament carrying a very mild current was touched to exposed brain matter and produced mental effects. He concluded that there must be a similar effect produced by certain radiations."

"I'll remember that," Duf said.

"Not for long," Fred said, remembering how little time was left. "Anyway, to complete your picture of the Johnson effect, it formed the basis of the modern science of astrology and proved that the old superstitious cult of astrology that attributed strange in-

fluences over our lives to astral bodies wasn't so far off. But I wonder—you say this strange effect first was noticed ten days ago?"

"Yes," Duf replied.

"I wonder if it could originate at that black body we're coming toward," Fred said aloud to himself. "Its radiations are in the infra-red and short radio waves that could build up harmonics in brain cells and trigger them." He looked at Duf penetratingly. "Do you feel those strange effects right now?"

"N-no," Duf said slowly. "That is, you don't notice them at any time. You just realize half an hour later that you weren't functioning right at the time. It comes and goes, and you don't know about it except by reflection, later."

"Hmmm," Fred said. "That's interest—"

The word changed to a gasp of alarm as he was picked up and, for the second time, tossed across the room against the far wall.

This time he landed on his feet. Duf, also profiting from that other experience, also landed feet first.

The two slid slowly down the wall to where it met the floor, and there they were held, unable to climb onto either the floor or the wall.

Fred attempted to stand in the V shaped trough that was "down" to him. Every atom of his body seemed to be gaining in weight. He managed to straighten briefly, then his knees buckled. He sat down, then lay down.

His eyes sank back in their sockets perceptibly. The skin of his face drew back, against his will, stretching his mouth open. And even as he fought against the tremendous pull he was impersonally trying to estimate its strength. Three gravities? Six? Ten?

He lost consciousness.

PAUL AWOKE to a universe filled with nothing but blackness and a dull ache that throbbed outward into the void and echoed back undiminished, piling up on itself. He opened his eyes. The blackness ceased to be, but the ache continued.

Directly in front of his eyes, so close that it hurt his eyes to bring it in focus, was a foot. He lifted his head with infinite care, followed the foot to a slender ankle, followed that to a shapely calf and knee that ended at the hem of a pink nylon gown.

Unmindful of the pain that it brought, he lifted his head sharply and looked at the cloth shrouded form that ended with a horizon of two shapely mounds.

Fragments of memory were rushing back, and with them a soul-searing shame.

He raised to full arm length. Myra's face came into view. Her eyes were closed. She was unconscious.

He became aware of something queer about his position. He looked down. In looking down he was looking at the V formed by the wall and the floor. The meaning of this strange shift of "down" dawned on him. It meant that besides the centrifugal force of the ship's spin which would tend to make the floor "down", there must be an acceleration of the ship along the axis of that spin.

The memory of the invisible hand plucking him into the air just as he was about to—fo—he shied away from the thought—came back to him. He had been out of his head. He knew it at the time. Now he knew it in a different way.

Suddenly he realized he was his old self, no longer a maniac. The reaction that followed that realization made him so weak that he sunk down into the V-shaped trough of the floor and the wall again. He would be dead now if

it weren't for that unholy and unconsummated lust for Myra's body that had possessed him. Next to that lust in his distorted mind had been the urge for self-destruction.

Had that lust been unconsummated? He searched his memory frantically. He had just bent over Myra as she lay on the bed unclothed when they were tossed across the room. There was the memory of them flying through the air—then blankness.

He lifted his head and looked at Myra again. She was wearing a gown. The fact confused him.

He searched his memory again. Sharp and clear was the memory of her sliding out of her gown in automatic routine of preparing to bathe which he had never observed before, the robots performing the duty of caring for the sleepers, but which he knew how to set in motion in case the robots were ever out of commission.

Yet now she wore her gown. And she was unconscious, apparently knocked out in the same accident that had ended his mad intentions so abruptly. It didn't make sense. How could she have gotten up, gone over and put on her gown, then come back and lay down, unconscious?

Another thought came to him. She would have taken her shower before putting on her gown again. Her habit patterns would have prevented her from doing the latter until she had done the former.

Therefore she must not have been knocked out by that cataclysm. She must have picked herself up off the floor, taken her shower, dressed, and then later been shot across the room again to be knocked out. That meant at least two such violent upheavals.

Myra's form shuddered with a deeply indrawn breath. She was coming to. Paul remained motionless, watching. When her eyes opened they held no curiosity nor alarm, but only

the placid awareness of a sleeper.

That was good. She would lie where she was, quiet. He could leave her and investigate what was going on. He smiled tenderly under his growth of beard. Myra's face showed no recognition of his smile. It was relaxed, mirroring no thought.

He got to his feet and stumbled to the door.

OUT IN the corridor he stumbled towards the elevator, hopping from the floor to the wall in order to stay out of the V they formed. When he reached the elevator doors he saw the dial above them moving.

It would be the two robots, he thought, and that presented another problem. They had been trying to capture him during his madness. Would they still try to get him?

The glass of the elevator doors showed him his unkempt appearance and his beard. He had no recollection of how long he had been out of his head. It seemed forever.

If he were to go up to the control room looking like he was, he might defeat his ends. Better to clean up first, even at the cost of a few precious minutes.

He continued along the corridor until he reached a lavatory. Ten minutes later when he emerged his face was cleanly shaven and washed. His torn and dirty uniform would have to wait until later. At least now the robots could see the expression of his face and read the recovered sanity there.

He had pressed the elevator button before. The elevator was waiting for him. Inside, he had to prop himself to get the door closed. His sense of balance told him the floor was tilted about forty-five degrees.

While he waited for the elevator to reach the top of the shaft his mind was externally induced. The controls of the ship would have stopped the

spin when the broadside acceleration became even half a gravity, so the spin must now be produced by an external force.

Suddenly he remembered the dark body that had been sighted just before—just before he went out of his head! How long ago was that? Had they passed that interstellar cold body? Of course there would be no real danger. The autonavigator would compensate for that and set a safe course.

Paul shook his head, bewildered. He wondered briefly if he weren't in a new form of irrationality, a new type of madness. First Myra with her gown on when his memory told him it should be off. Now a memory of an approaching dark planet or sun before he went mad. And crazy behavior in the ship itself.

Was his reason trying to cope with external unreason—or was internal unreason trying to cope with external normalcy? A thing like that would take someone outside himself to give the answer.

The elevator came to a stop. The door started sliding open, pinching his feet. He propped himself again. When it was open he half slid, half ran out. It wasn't as bad as it had been down at the bottom, next to the ship's rim, but it was bad enough.

The stairway proved difficult. Without a handrail to cling to he could never have made the first few steps because they tipped downward at least thirty degrees.

Gradually the direction of verticalness shifted until he was walking—not up the steps, but along a slightly sloping floor that would ordinarily be the wall of the stairway. But now he could walk normally, because he could use the walks and doors built for when the ship was in non-spin flight under the influence of a strong gravitational field. Throughout the entire ship there was this dual construction.

"Fred!" he exclaimed in glad surprise at the sight of the man bent over the direct-view telescope.

Fred sprang away from the telescope and looked at Paul warily.

"How're you feeling, Paul?" he asked cautiously.

"I'm O.K. now," Paul said reassuringly. "I suppose the robots told you I was out of my head. I was. I got a blow on the head from falling across a room. That must have snapped me out of it, because I was all right mentally when I woke up."

"It's too bad you woke up," Fred said. "Come look at this." He pointed at the telescope, his manner holding a shade of reserve and curtness.

He looked into the telescope. What he saw made him straighten in surprise and horror. Rushing up into the telescope was a smooth expanse of flat solidity, only minutes away.

"We have only minutes to live, Paul," Fred said gravely. "We're going to crash. And even if we managed somehow to survive, the gravity down there is enough to crush us out flat from our own weight. We can't feel its effect because we're in almost free fall, but if we were to stop stationary with the surface right now we'd each weigh about twenty tons."

Horror drew Paul back to the telescope eyepiece. He watched the surface below rush toward him.

IT COVERED the entire heavens, looming so close that there was almost no indication of curvature to it. There were irregular gray patches divided by narrow dark separations that might have been canals. Here and there an intensely white spot formed a pinpoint of brilliance. And the whole was expanding so rapidly that it created the illusion of a movie shot, unreal.

There were less than seconds now. Paul drew back and jerked Fred's

sleeve in an invitation for him to take a last look. Fred stood still and shook his head.

The two men stood looking at each other, their faces earnest, tense against the inevitable, yet calm in the knowledge that it would come too swiftly for human senses to register.

There wouldn't be time for the first shudder of buckling metal to register. No time for the first awful pain to register in consciousness. Before the first nerve impulse could travel an inch along its channel to the brain, that nerve would be crushed, and the brain with it. Crushed to primal ooze. Perhaps vaporized, with broken molecules, as each atom struck and rebounded with a force greater than molecular binding energies.

The realization that they had not struck came to each of them at the same time. It was followed by doubt, then conviction that the time for collision was past.

Each saw a reflection of his thoughts in the face of the other. They hesitated. It was Fred who bent over the telescope to see.

What he saw was a pinpoint of light an infinite distance away. Paul took his place and saw the same thing. Except for that minute point there was nothing but absolute blackness.

He swung the telescope a full half-circle to the opposite direction. Here was a similar, though larger point of light. It was a small disc of light, with some parts of it brighter than others—like the heavens!

"So!" he breathed, straightening. "We've entered a hole that goes right through the entire planet. And it wasn't by chance, either. Those forces acting on the ship—"

He and Fred looked at each other, comprehension of what that implied patent in their expressions. It meant they had been guided into the hole by intelligent beings of some kind. It

meant perhaps that they wouldn't die, but come to rest under the guidance of those forces, and meet those intelligent beings.

"One of us had better wake up the others," Paul said. "Or maybe we'd better divide the task."

"O.K.," Fred agreed. "I hope there's time before we land to let them get oriented and to tell them what's happened."

"I'll go wake them," Paul said, turning to leave.

"No!" Fred's voice was suddenly sharp and insistent. Paul turned back in surprise. "I'll do it myself," Fred added. He pushed past Paul without looking at him directly.

Paul frowned after Fred's departing back, then shrugged his shoulders and returned to the telescope.

FRED HAD regained consciousness, found that the robot, Duf, was out of order again, and had gone directly to the control room. When Paul had entered he had studied him closely, remembering what Duf had said about him.

He had found little to reassure him that Paul was normal, other than a certain sanity of action. Paul had been clean-shaven, but with a dirt ring just above his collar, and clothes that stunk with filth.

He had remained wary, though civil. But when Paul had started down to waken the others he had put his foot down. Now, when he stepped out of the elevator, he wedged the door open so that it wouldn't go back up. It didn't imprison Paul, since there were half a dozen ways of getting down to rim level from the hub of the ship; but it would definitely delay him for a long enough time to waken a few of the others and warn them.

He decided to waken Myra first and find out what had happened to her. He went first to the medical

stores and got a case of drenal.

Myra was lying in the V of the wall and floor, her eyes open and calm, her gown covering but not concealing her slim, well-formed body. As he looked down at her he frowned at a small voice inside his mind that whispered that he couldn't wholly blame Paul for what he might have done. Of the four women on the ship, she was the most beautiful in every way.

Still frowning, he bent down and jabbed the needle in the soft white flesh of her lax arm, shoving the plunger in until the glass container was empty. He drew out the needle gently, holding his finger where it went in so that none of the drenal would spurt out.

It would take a few moments. He put a refill in the needle and waited. Shortly, a muscle just under Myra's right eye twitched perceptibly. The calm placidity of her eyes was slowly replaced by a new light.

She looked up at Fred, calmly, but with recognition and intelligent awareness patent in their depths. Still he said nothing, knowing that the mind behind those eyes was not completely awake yet. In the years that it had been asleep, every mental tension had died down. The thousand and one cumulative trains of thought that make up normal mental life, and are only partially dispersed during one night's sleep, would take time to build up again, just as it takes time for a power generator of any type to pick up to operating speed and warmth.

Suddenly she jerked, as full consciousness welled into existence, accepting the pattern of sensory and body impulses. It was, Fred always thought when he watched the phenomenon, very much like an electric generator connecting onto the power line and its load, when the mind connected to the universe around it and lifted the

manifold impressions to the level of thought.

A sensitive smile came to her soft red lips as her eyes dwelt on him, studying his face. Then she spoke.

"What's happened?" she asked. "Have we arrived at Polaris?"

Fred hesitated. If he told her what had happened she would be completely wrapped up in that.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Why—" She looked around her for the first time, and saw where she was lying and the angle of the room in relation to up and down. "I feel all right." She stretched, arching her back, drawing in her stomach, flexing her legs. "No bruises. No bones broken."

"Do you feel like—" Fred hesitated, choosing his words. "Do you feel like you'd been man-handled?"

Her eyebrows arched upward in startled surprise.

"N-no," she said slowly. "Should I?"

Briefly, then, he told her all that had happened.

"Are the others awake yet?" she asked when he had finished.

"No," he answered. "I wanted to wake you first and find out what happened while Paul was locked in here so long."

"So it effects you too," Myra said softly.

"What do you mean?" Fred asked, puzzled.

"The madness," she said. "Do you realize what you've done? There is a grave emergency that might develop into something fatal at any moment. You've locked a madman in the control room and wasted time waking me, when every dictate of common sense screams that you should have by now administered the drenal to us all, so we would all be awake to deal with whatever arises."

"But—" Fred protested.

"But nothing," Myra said. "Are you going at once to waken the others?"

He frowned at her in silence, feeling very uncomfortable. It was all the more uncomfortable because she was fifty-one percent right. He was not used to being caught even partly in the wrong—and she had practically accused him of being irrational!

He turned abruptly and left, the back of his neck hot and red, feeling that he was surrounded by alternatives of action that were all indications of madness. If he stayed to argue it would be delaying the waking of the others. If he left abruptly, as he was doing, it would be churlishness. If he had stayed for another second or two and said, "O.K., I'll go wake the others," she might have replied, "Well go do it then instead of finding excuses to stay a little longer."

Everyone is vulnerable to a calm accusation of insanity. Yet sanity, rational thinking, must be based on a calm faith in the sanity of the mind.

He woke the other two men, then injected the drenal in the other three women.

It was still rankling in his mind when he returned to Myra's room to tell her all had received the shot of drenal that would waken them.

She was not there.

HE HURRIED to the elevator. He had left it with the door jammed open. Now the door was closed and the indicator was to the top.

Myra had gone up to the control room even though he had warned her that Paul still showed signs of insanity. Fred stood there, looking at the indicator with its mute but horrible suggestiveness, his mind torn between the desire to rush up to the control room to protect her, and the realization that he must get to each of the ones he had awakened and make sure they were all right.

And one sick corner of his mind lewdly suggested that Myra might have gone up because she hoped Paul was still insane. But, his thoughts whispered hastily in her defense, it was more likely she didn't fully realize the danger of being alone up there with a man who might—

He shunned completion of the thought. But his mind was made up. The injuries the awaking sleepers might suffer would be only physical. Myra could be suffering injury that would mar her soul.

He pressed the call button for the elevator, feeling again the frustrating effect of choosing one of two very wrong courses of action. Whatever he did would be wrong, he was sure.

The car arrived. He stepped into it and pressed the starter button. The door slid shut smoothly. The car started up. It had gone less than two feet when the sound of a scream came to his ears.

It was a female scream, high-pitched and terrified. It was so ragged and full of emotion that it might have come from any woman. The walls of the elevator muffled it just enough so that its direction was uncertain. It could have come from above or below. It could have been Myra—or one of the three awaking women.

And the elevator could not change its direction or speed. It would continue slowly to the very top before it would obey further button pushing.

Fred groaned. If the scream had come a minute sooner while he was still in the corridor he could have known from which direction it had come with certainty. As it was, he tried to still the judgment that told him it had seemed to come from the corridor along which the rooms of the waking sleepers lay.

An eternity later the elevator stopped. The door opened. On swift, reckless feet he took the stairs. A mo-

ment later, without pausing, he dived into the control room.

With numbing shock his eyes registered what he had feared. Across the room by the telescope, Myra stood with her back to him. Around her waist were two dirt-stained arms, one around the slim of her waist, the other, with huge paw outspread, pressing against her shoulders, holding her in a vice from which she could not escape.

"Let go of her!" Fred shouted, his voice harsh.

Then, unbelievably, he saw Myra and Paul separate and turn toward him, their arms still around each other, faces changing from happiness to amazement and anger.

He was in midair, hurtling toward them. He saw Paul shift quickly, thrusting Myra behind him, and bring out his arm stiffly. He felt himself brought to a painful stop in midair, and fall to the floor under the impetus of his own motion.

So the scream had not come from Myra's lips. It was one of the others—and every second counted.

All the doubts and mental torture of the moment before shifted their mental energies into a channel of bitterness and anger. As he fell he prepared to spring away.

H E LEFT the control room as he had come, without a backward glance or word of explanation. It was all too obvious what had happened.

Myra had realized that Paul's actions had revealed his secret desires, but on an animal level. Because he had chosen her in his madness as the object of his lust, it indicated that deep within him was a love for her. She had gone straight up to him.

And he—he was supposed to be making sure the sleepers awakened without harm. One of the girls had screamed minutes ago. She might be running blindly along the corridors

this very moment, or even be dead with a crushed skull from headlong, panic-stricken flight from nameless horrors.

His actions could only be construed as those of a snooping busybody, deserting his obvious duties to pry into the actions of others.

God, but the elevator was slow!

Suddenly it became even slower. It stopped moving completely. Fred worked the switches off and on frantically without getting any results. The realization of what had happened sunk in with devastating effect.

Myra and Paul had stopped the elevator from the control room. They had done so because they thought he was mad, insane. They had imprisoned him effectively, and were going down another way to take care of the waking sleepers. They had realized that he must have deserted his duty, leaving those waking minds to the vagaries of fate.

He raged. He beat ineffectively at the doors, knowing that even if they opened he would find nothing but bare metal wall on the other side.

His fists stopped their pounding. He drew back into the car slowly, a growing wonder on his face. His eyes were wide from surprise and dawning realization.

Because he knew in that moment that he had been insane. Was insane right now. Duf's words intoned in his mind. *"It's interference of the imagination with orderly thought processes . . . you don't realize it at the time. You just realize half an hour later that you weren't functioning right at the time."*

The expression of amazement on his face faded into one of almost petulance. His inner dignity, his self-assuredness had received a staggering blow. He sat down on the floor absently, not even recognizing that it was once again level as it should be, and

as it had been when he had gone to sleep years ago.

He leaned his back against the wall opposite the doors, and looked at those closed doors, letting the symbolism of their presence have its effect on him. He was walled in.

Slowly he felt the pleasure of being walled in, unable to do anything. It was much nicer than having nothing but bad choices of what to do, with the knowledge beforehand that whatever you did would be the worst possible thing to do.

So I'm insane, he thought. He flavored the thought, then spoke it aloud.

"So I'm insane," he said, his voice sounding hamish with no one there to hear it except himself. He chuckled uncomfortably. "Funny..."

But he knew it wasn't funny. It was tragic. Tragic, because a large part of him was still very sane—or even super-sane, as though sanity, in being crowded out of part of his mind had become more concentrated in the rest of it.

So he couldn't do anything now. So he couldn't know what was going on outside the elevator and let his imagination work overtime on it, making him do things that were irrational. That cut out the insane part of him—or at least thwarted it. And he could still use the same parts of his mind to study things.

What should he study? The problem of insanity, of course. Whatever force or radiation was causing the insanity had affected Paul first. It had taken a while, but it had affected him finally. Had it affected Myra?

Of course it had affected Myra! Why hadn't he realized that? He had concluded hastily from the evidence that she had gone up to the control room to face Paul with the proof that he loved her. It was more logical in the light of things now to believe that

with the first onslaught of irrationality she had felt an insane animal passion sweep over her, and had gone to the one she felt would accept it, rather than to himself.

The others would become insane shortly, now that they were awake. At least one of them was already insane, judging from that single, terrorized scream.

That meant that soon they would all be crazy, including himself, and there would be no one with the rationality to assume responsibility for them all.

"But," he said aloud to the expressionless walls of the elevator, "insanity can be circumvented by deciding upon a rational course calmly, and then sticking to it regardless of how things might seem later on. Dead reckoning. That's the way to beat it!"

PAUL HAD returned his attention to the telescope when Fred left to waken the sleepers, feeling a little disturbed by Fred's suspicions, but realizing that he did present a disturbing sight with his unkempt figure, and that the robots had told Fred of his being out of his head. If he were in Fred's place he would have felt the same way.

As his eyes focused on the telescope image he forgot Fred and the others completely at what he saw. The pinpoint of light that had been far away moments before was now close enough to resolve with the terrific magnification. It was not starlight as he and Fred had presumed!

The source of the image was still over a thousand miles distant, but it was clear and sharp. It was an enlargement of the bore, showing a surface of granite in which another opening continued the straight line through the huge world.

In itself the scene was unspectacular.

But it indicated a tremendous inner space hollowed out of the very heart of the planet. A space at least a thousand miles across.

In such a space there could be a veritable world within a world of life and civilization. No matter how great the strength of gravity at the surface, here in the center it would be nothing at all. No gravity. If the ship came to a stop it would be as free from gravity as though it were in outer space!

Slowly the angle of view of this inner world increased. As it increased, its rate of increase lessened. The ship was slowing down rapidly enough so that it would probably not shoot through to the other bore.

Their capture, their entrance into the hole running to the center of this mysterious giant world far out between suns, and now their slowing down as they neared this central hollow space, all were irrefutable evidence of intelligent beings guiding the ship by unknown powers.

The madness he had suffered—perhaps that had been an offshoot of the force that had taken them under tow. Certainly he wasn't insane now!

What kind of creatures would these beings be? Would they be human—of the same root stock as the human race? Some theoreticians believed that the only possible vehicle of intelligence was the human. They postulated that life in any other part of the universe, even though it might have had a separate origin from that of the life on earth, could not attain intelligence unless it reproduced the human form.

They backed their logic with rather strong evidence, too. They pointed out that the human developed from a gene pattern that was in reality a highly complex molecule. They argued that the atoms on other bodies conducive to life of the hydrocarbon variety were the same as those on earth, and that life on earth had evolved every possi-

ble type of nuclear pattern. Therefore life on other worlds must repeat the evolution on earth, and the end product would be human beings—perhaps slightly different in some superficial characteristics, but nevertheless human.

Size was something else again. They could be six inches tall or fifty feet tall, depending on the activity of their hyperthalamus and the age at which it changed. If they were smaller, they would have to remain smaller; but if they were larger it would be possible to equal their size. That would be Fred's job. He had the shots in his equipment for stimulating the hyperthalamus to new life, causing them all to start growing rapidly, and keep on growing until they reach almost any size.

Paul studied the sides of the bore the ship was in. The diameter of the bore was a little over half a mile, which was enough to accommodate a ship large enough to carry twenty-foot giants.

Something strange in such a hole going right down to the center of the world. Even on earth the pressure would have caused solid rock to flow like butter and fill it up. Here the pressure at the center must be incalculable! A thousand billion tons, perhaps, to the square inch! But since the hole obviously existed, it must be possible. Maybe under such pressures ordinary matter became something else, with nuclei so close together that it developed new properties of sheer and compression able to withstand thousands of billions of tons pressure.

Paul's speculations about it were ended by the emergence of the ship into the hollow interior of the world, and the impact of its tremendous distances.

THE FAR side of the hollow space was two thousand miles away. A

quick glance at the figures superimposed in the image disclosed that fact. It would have been utterly impossible to describe the scene. Filmy clouds in layer after layer, atmosphere that seemed self-luminous, becoming bluish far away, so that the far side topography seemed almost to be another cloud layer of a darker color, seen here and there vaguely through the mist.

There was atmosphere. That took a moment to make its effect. Paul glanced over at the outside pressure gauge and saw that it was seventeen and a fraction pounds per square inch.

If their ship had plunged into this in free fall it would have been heated to incandescence in seconds!

"Paul!" The sound of a voice behind him made him start. Even as he straightened from the telescope he recognized it as Myra's voice.

A slow flush spread over his face as he turned to face her. And from the intensity of her gaze and the straight line of her lips he knew that she had been told.

"So Fred has told you," he said, his voice flat and spiritless.

"He told me something," Myra said.

Paul looked at her curiously. The way she had said that hadn't been the way he had expected her to say it. And now she was smiling.

"What did he say?" he asked.

"Do you love me, Paul?" Myra asked, ignoring his question.

Paul dropped his gaze. His eyes settled on her slim waist and smoothly curved hips. He jerked his eyes away, looking across the room.

"Do you or don't you?" Myra asked. She stamped her foot in half-humorous anger.

"Yes," he muttered, not looking at her.

"Then why hide it?" she asked.

"Why?" he asked in dumb astonishment. "Would it do any good to tell

it? You know we aren't to let such things upset the Plan!"

"The Plan isn't that important," Myra exclaimed. "Fred told me that the robot, Duf, said you had been out of your head, and had been in my room with me for a long time." She saw the flush returning to his face and went on hastily "If you thought of me in that way when you were beyond reason, it doesn't take Freud or Jung or even Herbitcheff to tell me that when rational you loved me, and do love me right now"

"All right, I do," Paul said defiantly. "What about it?"

"Oh, for Pete's sake," Myra said, using an obsolete barbarism she had acquired in her reading. "Don't you know what to do about it?" And as he took one quick step toward her and seized her, she added in a murmur, "I guess you do."

As their lips met crushingly, a sound came from far away. It might have been the wind outside the ship, penetrating the soundproof insulation lining the shell, or it might have been the scream of a woman. Myra thought about it disinterestedly. But Fred was there to take care of the awakening sleepers. If it was a scream he would handle things.

The kiss stretched on. Paul and Myra were wrapped in a world of dreams realized. Their lips parted now and then to allow them to look into each other's eyes, with all veils pulled aside.

Suddenly Paul drew back and pulled her to one side, half turning her. Briefly, she saw Fred hurtling across the room toward them, Paul's hand reach out and stop him, thrusting him to the floor.

Then Fred got to his knees and glared at them both, his eyes accusing, mad. He said no word. He glared for a moment, then turned and rushed

from the pilot room.

"Oh, Lord," Paul muttered. "He's out of his head."

"Do something," Myra said. "He's going back down there. He's in no condition to take care of the others. They're waking right now. That scream—maybe he's done something to one of the other girls."

Paul rushed to a switchboard and pulled a switch.

"That will imprison him in the elevator," he said. "Let's go down and see. We can take one of the tubes down."

THE TUBES were shafts that ran from the central hub of the ship, where the pilot room was located, to the outer rim, each tube forming a spoke that passed from deck to deck, and containing welded-in rungs to form a ladder. They had other uses, containing all the conduits that carried wires for lights and communication, and also served as the air-conditioning shaft network. Ordinarily they were never used. The automatic elevators were more comfortable.

Paul and Myra had just reached the bottom of the tube and were stepping through the door into the corridor when the line of the vertical that had been at a crazy angle slowly but firmly shifted back to normal, allowing them to stand and walk normally on a level floor.

Paul knew why it had changed back. The ship was now in the center of the large body where its gravitational influence was cancelled out. Only the centrifugal spin of the ship entered into the force-vector that determined which way was down.

The corridor, Paul and Myra saw, was empty. They hurried along it, listening at each door, until they came to one where they heard voices. They pushed it open.

Inside were two men and three girls. One of the girls, Gertrude Minor, was lying on the bed. Beside her, sitting on the bed's edge, was Lila Adams. The others were Grace Stevens, Arthur Graham, and Charles Laney. This was all the people on the ship.

As Myra and Paul closed the door and started across the room, all eyes turned to them.

"What's this all about?" Arthur Graham asked, a note of anger undisguised in his voice. "Why are we all awakened and left to ourselves this way?"

"That's Fred's doings," Paul said. "He's out of his head."

"Then why didn't Ram and Duf lock him up?" Art Graham asked.

"Is Gertrude hurt badly?" Myra asked, ignoring the exchange.

"I gave her a sedative," Lila said. "She awoke with horrible nightmares in her mind. She'll be all right when she wakes up again. What's happened?"

"We're half way to Polaris," Myra explained, "and we've been captured by some gigantic cold sun. From what Fred said, we've entered a large shaft that goes down through its center. But Fred's irrational right now, and we have him imprisoned in the elevator with the power shut off."

"What's the matter with Paul?" Grace Stevens asked, looking over at him where he stood explaining things to the men. "His clothes are so dirty."

"He was out of his head for a long time, but is all right now," Myra said. Then the girls stopped talking and listened to what Paul was saying.

"It has a diameter of eight hundred and fifty thousand miles," he was saying, "and a surface gravity two hundred times that of the earth. The ship was guided into the opening from outside, so there must be intelligent beings here."

"But how can there be, and why are we not crushed if gravity is two hundred g's?" Lila Adams asked.

"We've gone through that hole right down to the center of the body," Paul explained. "We're in a hollow center two thousand miles in diameter, and gravitation forces neutralize one another here at the center."

"That's impossible!" Grace Stevens ejaculated. "Solids would flow like water. There couldn't be a hollow center!"

"There is," Paul said calmly, "and you'll see for yourself. I think under such pressures matter behaves differently than we thought it would. It either becomes heavy matter with new properties, or we haven't explored all the possible states of ordinary matter, and there's a super-solid state."

"But let's forget that right now. There's something more important. Right now Myra and I have Fred locked in the elevator. He's out of his head. I was out of my head for ten days and just recovered a few hours ago. There's some harmful radiation here that does it, and it may happen to all of us. That's probably what happened to Gertrude."

"You mean a radiation can make a person become irrational?" Charles Laney asked incredulously.

"Exactly," Paul said grimly. "I should know. I was all right ten days ago when the instruments first sighted this body." He shuddered involuntarily at the memory. "Toward the end I was primarily interested in killing myself to end my suffering. And poor Fred—you should have seen him a few minutes ago when he rushed in on Myra and me in the pilot room."

"Then," Arthur Graham said gravely, "we'd better see to him immediately."

"I'll go up to the control room and start the elevator again," Paul agreed. "You two men be at the door of the

elevator ready to seize him." Arthur Graham and Charles Laney nodded.

At the door Paul turned. A look of deep understanding passed between him and Myra.

FRED DAVIS had thought out his plan long before the elevator started up again and continued its slow journey. He had reviewed it again and again in his mind, repeating aloud all its major essentials so that even if he were to become irrational it would govern his actions.

When the automatic doors opened to reveal Arthur Graham and Charles Laney staring at him intently, ready to seize him if he showed signs of abnormalcy, he was expecting them.

He smiled self-consciously.

"I'm sorry that I left you to fend for yourselves," he said apologetically. "I suppose Paul has told you what happened. I was under the influence of whatever it is penetrating the ship's insulating shields."

"How do you feel now?" Charles asked him cautiously.

"I'm all right now—I think," Fred answered. He stepped out of the elevator. "That scream I heard, who was it? And was she taken care of?"

"It was Gertrude," Arthur Graham said, relaxing. "She came out of her sleep with nightmares; but Lila gave her a shot to let her sleep normally."

"She'll be all right then when she wakes up," Fred said with the self-assurance of a doctor. "That is," he frowned, "unless it's affected her already. How do you two feel?"

Before they could answer, Paul shot out of the door from the tube-way.

"Come up to the control room," he said. "We're approaching something." In the elevator he continued. "It looks like some sort of landing field, but I don't see any buildings or signs of civilization around it."

Ten minutes later the automatic alarm sounded throughout the ship, signaling a landing. The gyro mechanism aided by small thrusts from tangent rocket tubes killed the ship's spin. The dials on the meter panel registered a tenth gravity away from the surface on which they were landing and toward the star's mathematical center.

No one had touched manual controls. From outer space the ship had entered the bore to the center of the cold star, and was now landing, guided by directive forces from outside.

Charles Laney, studying the meters and the panorama in the telescope, hit on a probable reason for no sign of movement below—or rather, above, on the landing field.

"Anything on that surface would fall off," he said. "They must be in caverns inside the surface, where they'd have something to walk on."

The ship came to a landing without a jar. The meters showed a thrust of ten thousand pounds away from the surface, holding the ship on the field.

Air pressure outside was seventeen and-two tenths. Air content showed oxygen, with forty per-cent inert materials, in the chemical analyzer. In the spectro-analyzer the inerts became ninety per-cent helium.

Each of the men was busy at some task of inspection. Covers over portholes were slid back, revealing the surface next to the ship to be solid stone—as was to be expected, since every loose particle would fall off.

PAUL HAD turned the telescope back toward the center of the hollow sphere again. Through a break in the clouds he saw something that made him call the others to look.

It was a glistening sphere. Cutting in the spectro-analyzer, it was found to consist of water.

"What a weird setup!" Charles

Laney exclaimed. "A hollow world where up is away from the surface, and an ocean in the center of the hollow space, with clouds in the atmosphere that rain into that ocean, and universal light that comes from nowhere and casts no shadow."

"Let's see what else we can find out," Paul said. He went to a wall of cabinets and took out instruments.

Half an hour later they had found out plenty. Light speed, which had been thought to be a universal constant in the twentieth century, but was found to vary after space travel had been attained, was found to be fifty-three thousand miles per second—the slowest ever recorded anywhere.

"But that's impossible!" Paul exclaimed as he read the measurement.

"Unless," Fred pointed out, "the size of your instrument has altered, as well as the length of the second."

"That's right!" Paul replied. "Anything could be a variable here. We can't know anything for sure. If light speed is a constant, then time rate has changed and size may have changed. We have no absolute yardsticks independent of variables and unknowns."

"We can't even be sure of the spectro-analyzer," Arthur Graham put in. "The only thing we can go on is what we know. We'd better use the spectro-analyzer on the air in here and see what it gives."

An hour later they had completed a series of comparisons which assured them the spectro-analyzer was still correct in its results, regardless of the length of the second and the speed of light.

Finally there was only one more test to be made.

"Now for the infra-red pattern," Paul said, sliding out a bulky machine on a telescoping-rod framework.

Fred watched as the other three concentrated on the workings of the

machine. They were not aware of it when he slipped silently out of the control room and took the elevator.

HE PAUSED outside the room where the girls were, his ear pressed to the panel. Words came faintly, indistinguishable. He left the door and went along the corridor until he came to his own room. There he picked up the inert form of Ram and carried it with him to the testing laboratory where Duf still lay, out of operation.

He laid both robots on the analyzer table and opened their shirts, exposing the plug-ins for the circuit analyzer. In moments he had located the damage.

Before repairing it, however, he took two small time relays and set them to make contact in four hours. Then he exposed the damaged relays and inserted new ones, with the time-relays in series, so that the two robots would remain inoperable for another four hours.

He left them on the table and made his way back to the room where the four girls were. He opened the door without pausing to listen.

"There you are!" It was Paul's voice, half angry, suspicious. Fred's eyes darted around the room and saw everyone was there. "We missed you," Paul went on.

Fred shrugged, remaining silent.

"Where were you?" Grace Stevens asked.

Fred looked at her distastefully. She was the geneticist and archeologist, rather plain looking. He had never cared much for her, and now, suddenly, he found himself taking a violent dislike to her.

"None of your business," he snapped.

Grace looked at the others significantly. The three men moved toward him a step, studying him warily.

"Fred's right," Lila Adams spoke up. "It's none of your business, Grace."

"Oh, you too," Grace said.

"You're the one that's crazy," Lila said. She sprang at Grace with the intention of pinning her down. Grace's hand came out and raked her face viciously.

Suddenly the two girls were scratching and pulling hair, shouting at each other.

Arthur Graham sprang to the struggling pair and grasped Lila by the shoulders. Instantly Fred was on him, knocking his hands away.

"Leave Lila alone," he gritted.

"Grab him," Art said, pushing Fred away and trying to get hold of Lila again. But Lila had broken free from Grace and turned to meet him with slashing fingers that left angry scratches on his face.

Ten minutes later seven badly damaged faces cracked into sheepish grins, as the seven stopped fighting from sheer exhaustion.

"This thing is subtle," Charles Laney said ruefully. "Of course we've all been absolutely nuts under the influence of that mysterious radiation. We've got to do something to prevent it, but what?"

"It's so damnable," Arthur Graham said in awed tones. "You do the logical thing, but it comes out more and more complicated and screwy every second."

"What is it?" a badly scratched Grace Stevens asked in a small, scared voice.

"It's a radiation that produces the Johnson effect," Fred said. "It's quite simple in principle. When a particular cell is stimulated in some way, it feeds an idea into the mind. In ordinary mental processes the brain cells are stimulated only by neural impulse from other nerve cells, and are unable

to become active without an external impulse. But this radiation must be one that sets up a harmonic vibration or electric current in the cell itself, so that it becomes stimulated without relation to neural processes going on in the mind at the time. That makes thought irrational." He turned to Lila, a queer smile on his lips. "Why did you stick up for me just now?" he asked gently.

"Why—why—" Lila stopped, confused.

"And another thing," Fred said, turning to the others. "Why are we all here arguing when the natural thing would be to be outside, trying to find entrances into what must be under this field we've landed on? It's because our minds are being continually filled with irrelevant thoughts, and we are blindly following each of them as it comes. They drown out the normal reactions."

He looked around at the appalled expressions on all their faces as they realized the truth of his words.

"There's only one thing for us to do right now," Fred continued, "The air outside is O.K.. We know we should be finding out about things outside. Let's go do it, and if anyone goes off on a tangent the rest of us can bring him back into line."

WHEN THEY reached the exit hatch Fred managed to lag a little behind the others, so that they were out of the ship when he stood in the opening.

"I just thought of something," he said, feigning a look of startled surprise. They turned to him curiously. "We should give Gertrude a little more to make sure she stays asleep until we get back."

"Oh! How could I have forgotten about her?" Lila exclaimed, starting to re-enter the ship. Fred stopped her.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll give her a shot."

Without giving her time to answer he ducked back in and went quickly to his laboratory. There he unlocked a refrigerated cabinet and took out a small vial of turgid fluid. He held it under the hot water faucet until it became clear, then slid it into the frame of a hypodermic needle.

Strangely, for a surgeon, his fingers trembled when he shoved the needle into the sleeping Gertrude's arm and injected the fluid.

Lila appeared in the doorway as he was drawing the needle out.

"Need any help?" she asked.

He whirled guiltily.

"No," he said. "It's done. By the way, why did you come to my defense when Grace was accusing me?"

By no outward sign did Lila seem to change. But something seemed to radiate from her that Fred could feel. The hypodermic needle dropped from his fingers unheeded as he took two long steps and met her in an embrace that made him tingle strangely. Locked in each other's arms, their lips crushed together, they grew weak and staggered, and leaned against the wall, breaking their passionate kiss just long enough to laugh at their weakness. Finally their arms loosened. Lila drew back and looked into Fred's eyes.

"Oh, brother!" she said dreamily.

Fred grinned, then his expression changed to one of frowning thoughtfulness.

"Strange," he muttered. "This must be due to that radiation. I've never experienced anything like it."

"It's radiating again," Lila murmured, crushing her lips into his.

They felt hands pulling them apart. They looked up dazedly to see the others standing around them.

"It's wonderful," Lila murmured dreamily.

Myra and Paul were looking at each other strangely. They moved toward each other, and were in each other's arms. Fred and Lila started kissing again.

Charles Laney caught Grace Stevens' eyes. She averted them hastily. But when he put his arms around her clumsily she closed her eyes and kissed him feverishly.

Art Graham watched the three couples uncomfortably, looked over at Gertrude Minor, asleep under the influence of drugs.

"Hey!" he said good-humoredly. "We're supposed to be exploring."

GERTRUDE MINOR lay quiet, her eyes closed. At first all she could remember was that she had awakened to horrible nightmares of formless terror that had caused her to run blindly, bouncing off walls and falling. She could remember the sharp prick of a needle in her arm, then drowsy peace.

Whatever the nightmare horror had been, it was gone now. Abstractly she diagnosed it as some phantom of childhood that had risen to consciousness freakishly.

"So it's my turn to be awake," she murmured. She lay still, lax, her eyes closed. In every cell of her body a ravenous hunger seemed to be growing. It was strange to feel hunger. The concentrated food tablets would have been given her regularly by Duf and Ram. The other times she had been wakened for her period of routine command of the fully automatic ship she had felt no such hunger.

She opened her eyes. The robots were not there. That was strange too, because they were supposed to remain with her until she was fully awake. Of course, she had been given a sleeping drug that made her fall into a normal sleep, until the nightmare wore off. But even so...

She stood up, swaying weakly. The room looked strange. She blinked her eyes and shook her head to clear her vision.

One thing that was wrong with the room was that down was not the way it should be. The ship was not spinning on its axis. But there was something else. Somehow the room seemed smaller than she remembered it.

She went over to the food tablet dispenser and took three of the tablets. She washed them down with hot water. In a moment she felt better. The food tablets were made up of fine grains of dehydrated gelatin that swelled enormously, bonded together with easily soluble food chemicals that almost instantly dissolved, leaving the fine granules of dehydrated gelatine exposed for quick expansion. Ordinarily three of the tablets were a meal.

Ten minutes later she took three more. Half an hour later she took another three. Her hunger continued, but she began to feel stronger as the blood-soluble energy foods began to take effect.

Finally she noticed the hypodermic syringe laying on the floor near the door, its needle broken. She picked it up. The glass cartridge in it carried merely a number that meant nothing.

An uneasiness came over her. The hypo dropped to the floor by someone who hadn't bothered to pick it up, the obvious fact that the ship had landed somewhere.

She left the room and went to the control room without meeting anyone. There she looked through the telescope at the vast, two-thousand-mile-diameter hollow world with its central sphere of ocean that her sense of balance told her was straight down.

She left the control room and found the opened hatch. She climbed out

onto the deck of the ship and soon found an opening in the rock surface over her head, leading upward.

She was hungry again. She turned back into the ship, going to a store-room, and taking a box of food tablets, enough for several weeks of ordinary consumption. Carrying the box under her arm, she returned to the opening leading up into the alien world. The others had come this way, she felt sure.

The passage led upward steeply, but was easy to climb under the weak gravity. It took a full hour to reach the end. During the climb she examined the sides of the tunnel. It was impossible to tell whether it was a natural opening or constructed.

When she emerged onto a flat expanse of ground covered with bluish appearing grasses, and looked up at a ceiling that must have been two hundred feet overhead, she again blinked her eyes and shook her head, bewildered. It was all too unreal.

The grass hung over the edge of the hole she had emerged from. In one place it had been torn by a scraping foot, showing that someone had passed this way. But nowhere within view was the least sign of the other members of the ship.

GERTRUDE debated what to do. While she pondered, she absently popped food tablets into her mouth. She wasn't as hungry now, but was growing thirsty.

In one direction the ground rose to obstruct her view a hundred yards away. She went in the direction, studying the dome of the cavern far above, memorizing its topography so that she could find her way back if she went any distance.

When she topped the rise, a sigh of relief escaped her lips. Half a mile away was a stream. She started walk-

ing toward it, taking long strides. Her gown hampered her stride. She looked down at it.

She had not paid particular attention to it until now, but she knew definitely that when she had gone to sleep years before it—or one like it—had covered her ankles. It ended a foot from the ground now.

The thought entered her mind that she was growing. The absurdity of the thought made her smile—until she recalled the hypodermic syringe on the floor of the room she had awakened in. Fred Davis was the biochemist. He had the growth serum in his supplies. This was a colonization trip, not exploration. Their purpose was to find a place suitable for human life and settle in that place, and get the human race started there, so that the race would be independent of the life of one planet. There were other similar ships going out.

Had everyone on the ship been given the growth serum? Or was she just imagining things, and her gown was shrunk?

She came to the stream and squatted, dipping her hands in the water and drinking from them. Finally, her thirst satisfied, she straightened and let her eyes roam up and down the stream. There was no sign of any movement other than the flow of the stream.

To the right it continued for perhaps half a mile, then ended. She went in that direction until she reached a small lake. In its center was the small core of a whirlpool. Evidently there was a hole here that drained the water down to where it dropped toward that central sphere of water, or at least let it drop until it changed to cloudy mist that eventually settled into the huge droplet.

In all directions except upstream the landscape was monotonous. In that

direction were cliffs. She started toward them.

IT TOOK two hours to reach them.

During those two hours she ate a month's supply of food tablets and drank deeply from the stream several times. She grew weak. Her sandals grew too small and had to be discarded. Her gown ripped down the side. She tore it off and fashioned a two-piece garment from its remnants.

The stream came from a channel worn in the higher ground. She waded along the bank, so weak she could barely hold herself upright by leaning against the steep embankment.

The box of food tablets was empty. She threw it away. Often she dropped to her knees and drank directly from the stream. She grew hungry and discovered that a white, meaty growth on the rocks was good to eat. It was very similar to mushroom growths on the earth.

She came to a place where the channel of the stream widened. She sat down with her back to the rocky embankment and was asleep almost immediately. She awoke ravenously hungry. But the mushroom growths were more and more plentiful.

She had forgotten the past. Nothing existed for her but the necessity of eating and drinking. She had even forgotten her purpose in entering the narrow gorge that channeled the stream her feet waded in. The scant covering she had fashioned from her gown had become lost, leaving only the long, sweeping veil of her hair to cover her.

She rested often, lying in the stream full length and turning over so that its currents bathed her.

It was after one of these frequent bathings that she stood up, her head and shoulders rising above the lip of the canyon wall, and saw the little

people. They had just come around a bend in a natural ledge overlooking the river canyon.

There were hardly more than a foot tall.

* * *

"LIKE THIS?" Randy Graham asked, dropping lightly into the narrow channel of the stream and standing up so that his head and shoulders were above the level of the ground the others were standing on. His youthful eyes looked up at the man sitting on the ground with a fist resting on the narrow ledge of rock.

The twenty-odd other young people watched with fascinated expressions on their faces.

"Exactly," his father, Clarence Graham, said. "Just as you're standing now. Of course, as you've probably guessed, those little people were the seven others. They had been wandering around all that time, arguing, fighting, trying to think straight and started off on a tangent every time some brain cell triggered under the force of the strange radiation.

"But those radiations couldn't touch Gertrude. She was just as big then as I am, and you will be in a few years when you're full grown. It took her a minute to recognize them. Even when she did she couldn't believe her senses for a while. But one by one she recognized who they were.

"They were babbling in high-pitched voices that squeaked. One of them was screaming louder than the others, and she began to understand what he was saying. It didn't make much sense then, but she got the idea that if they were given the serum to make them as big as she was they would become rational again.

"She climbed out of the stream and gathered them all up in her arms, having to hold some of them by force.

Carrying them, she went back down the stream to where it ended, then cut across the meadow to the little hole in the ground.

"It was the same hole she had come up from, but now she couldn't even get one of her feet in it. And she didn't know what to do. She didn't dare let any of them go, because they were stark mad now. But while she was pondering, two others of the small people came up out of the hole. She recognized them at once, now that she knew how big she really was. They were Duf and Ram, the two robots.

"When things were straightened out she turned Fred Davis over to Duf and Ram, who took him back down to the ship. There he got enough of the growth serum to give all of them a shot and get them started to growing.

"Gertrude carried them back up the stream where they could eat the mushroom growth and drink all they wanted, and in a few days they were as big as she was."

"What happened then?" another youngster, Orvil Freeman, asked. "Did they get married?"

"Well," Clarence Graham said, smiling, "in a way, I guess they did. Anyway, those eight were your great-grandparents. They're dead now, but they lived happily and raised your grandparents."

Mary Laney, who had listened gravely throughout the whole story without saying a word opened her lips hesitantly.

"There's just one thing I can't understand," she said. "The ship was guided into the inside of our world by intelligent beings of some sort. I guess they never found them, but where are they?"

"There never were any, really," Clarence said. "Your grandparents figured that out eventually. That hole

from the outer surface right down to the center was caused by a natural gravitational vortex. No man-made machines could create energies that would make such a hole. The ship had just been trapped in that vortex and sucked in. When it got inside, the automatic pilot of the ship chose the most likely landing place and set the ship down—or rather, up, and held it there. It was no coincidence that there was a tunnel from there up to here, because there are hundreds of them, where rivers drain down, and air laden with moisture comes back up to bring rains that keep things growing."

"What happened to Ram and Duf?" Randy asked, climbing up out of the river.

"They wore out eventually," Clarence said. "I saw their remains when I was little. That was a long time ago, though, because with the increase in size of the people, their time rate slowed down. Right now, according to the time-rate of your great-grandparents before they got big, you are several hundred years old. Each of you. You'll be a couple of thousand years old before you are as old as I am."

"What became of the ship?" Mary Laney asked.

Clarence Graham shrugged.

"So far as I know," he said, "it's still waiting there. It was atom-powered, and could stay there for ten or twenty thousand years. But it wouldn't do anyone any good even if they could become small enough to get in it, because it would be impossible to go back up that hole and escape the gravitational pull of the globe."

The young people were silent, their eyes holding a faraway expression. Finally one of them, far enough away from the man to whisper without him hearing turned to his nearest companion.

"Do you believe all he said?" he whispered.

"Gee, I don't know," the other whispered back. "Some of it sounds O.K., but—stars!" He looked up at the uneven contours of the cavern roof far above that marked the upper boundary of his existence. "I don't believe those things exist. Not stars. They're too fantastic!"

INTO EXILE . . .

By
SALEM LANE

THE COMMANDER of the transport and freighter *Starlight* made a mark on the astro-chart. He puffed meditatively on his pipe. He put down the stylus and turned toward the pilot-officer.

"By the way," he asked, "has Carson been acting up?"

The young officer grinned: "Not a peep out of him, sir. He just sits and thinks. Doesn't even want to read. He's got a lot to think about, too."

Commander Olsen removed the pipe from his mouth. "Any three-time murderer deserves worse. If I'd have been the judge I would have insisted on the lethal room." He shrugged. "Oh well, they're all soft nowadays."

Pilot-Officer Merrill whistled. "I don't call perpetual exile on Ganymede soft, sir. Why, you know what life is like in the ice-colonies. I'd sooner die than face that. Carson isn't lucky."

"...I wouldn't say that," a soft voice interrupted them. Abruptly they turned toward the door. Facing them was Carson. He was leaning against the closed door. He appeared perfectly relaxed, changed only by his incipient prison-pallor. In his right hand was a small flame pistol.

"I couldn't help overhearing," he went on coolly. "I think you're right Merrill. Death is preferable to Ganymede. I saw the stereotypes of the ice-colonies." He grinned. "But I'm not going there—nor am I going to die."

Captain Olsen half-rose as if to touch an alarm stud.

"Stop!" Carson said sharply. "I'm not playing now. I've killed three men—one more won't make a difference. Stay where you are."

The helpless spacemen watched the arch-criminal gingerly climb into a space-suit, all the while keeping them covered with the gun, despite the awkwardness of the job. Finally he was suited.

"I didn't dare try elsewhere," he laughed, "there are too many crewmen running around."

"What do you expect to do?" the white-faced captain asked.

"The program is simple," Carson answered. "Beginning right now, sound the 'abandon-ship' warning. Move!"

Enraged, the captain pressed the buzzer and in the control room the echo of gongs and the flash of colored, coded lights

appeared as in the rest of the ship.

On the section videos the crew could be seen scurrying into the small life-boats according to the standard system. In five minutes the ship was empty of personnel save for Carson, the captain and the pilot-officer.

"You two are last," Carson finally observed. "I'm taking you to the number seven boat. Start walking." The two grim-faced officers plodded silently toward the number seven airlock.

Under Carson's hawk-face they board the small craft. The clang of doors, the whish of atmosphere and the boat was in space.

Disconsolately the two men surveyed the silver cylinder that was the *Starlight* now manned by a ruthless criminal.

Commander Olsen's anger escaped in a furious tirade of profanity, which served only to relieve his feelings. Merrill was silent.

Finally he spoke: "Well, the poor devil chose death after all." He shook his head.

"What do you mean?" Commander Olsen demanded. "He's got a perfectly good ship which he certainly can handle. He's been around. He'll make a port somewhere, somewhere where the police won't be."

"No he won't," Merrill said cryptically. "For God's sake, spit it out, if you know something," Olsen insisted.

There was a grin on Merrill's face.

"I destroyed his navigating and communicating equipment." He said. "Unless he's a better astronomer than I think he is, he's piloting nothing but a wandering-powered hulk. McFane was working on the power lines to all the equipment when Carson ordered abandon ship. I didn't want to mention it to you because I figured you'd give me hell. We were actually navigating for the past three hours on dead reckoning."

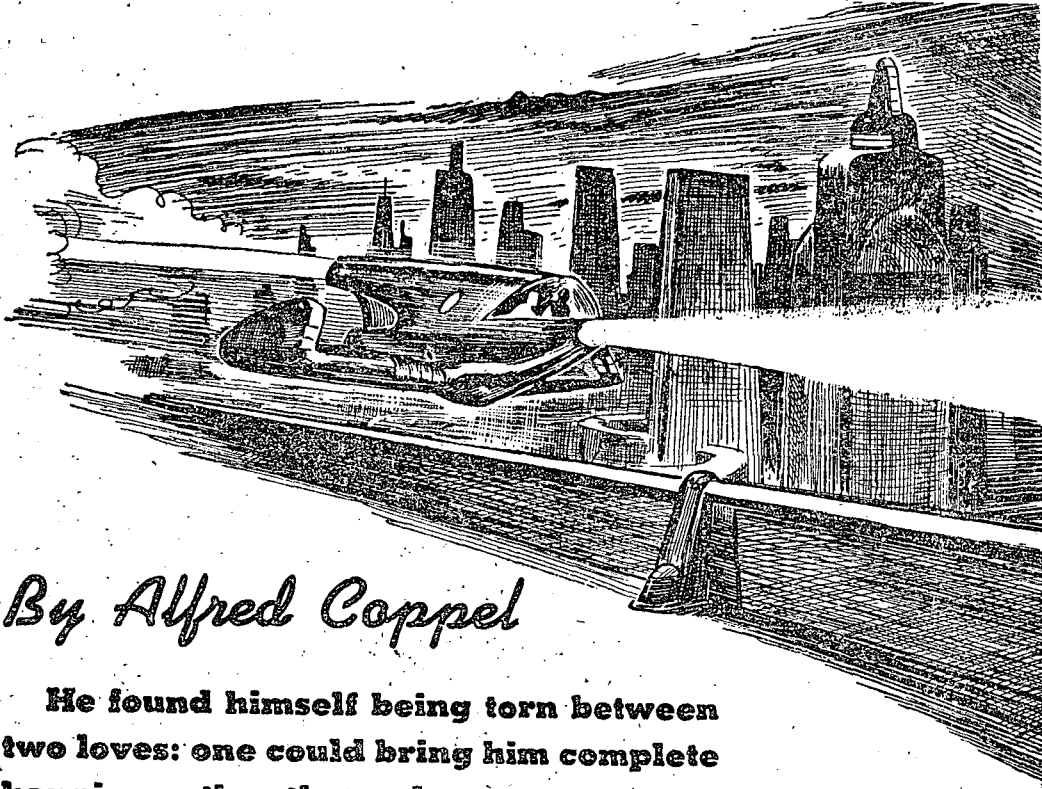
Olsen grinned, the strain leaving his face.

"Carson will commit suicide, I predict, before he surrenders. The police are sure to pick him up."

He looked at Merrill: "I should discipline you for this, you whippersnapper—but I won't. I don't want to see that man go free."

"He won't," Merrill reiterated. "Now he's a real exile. He belongs to nothing but a ship." Outside the port the stars twinkled a little brighter...

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER



By Alfred Coppel

He found himself being torn between two loves: one could bring him complete happiness; the other only a monument...

GREG ELY walked down the street from the Bureau filled with a sick despair. It was early March and an icy wind was blowing, driving grit and rubble before it through the nearly deserted canyons of the city. There were a few workers left on the streets, but these were hurrying home to beat the dusk curfew, their collars turned up against the cold. The city was bleak and cheerless, and Greg let himself think of Elna. Right now he wanted only to be with her—to let her comfort him. He wanted to seek her out and try

to explain his failure. But that was what he must not do. It was bad enough that he had let himself be trapped. He dare not lead the Monitors to Elna and the others.

Ely forced himself to walk slowly. It was a better than even chance that he was being followed now. The back of his neck tingled with anticipation of an electro-bolt that might lash out from any dark doorway. The Monitors worked that way sometimes. Then the Party news-sheet would carry a brief paragraph in the morning about the mysterious death of an obscure rocket



Even, as the rays enveloped him, Greg knew it was not yet time for him to die

man—and a mock search for non-existent saboteurs would rout a dozen or so workers out of their warrens and pack them off to the Camps. The murder of an “unreliable” would make no great uproar in a city that lived with death.

The narco examination had been routine. Every worker assigned to the Mars Project took one twice a year. But something had gone wrong. Marsden's mnemonic blocks had failed. They must have failed. The Director had been evasive—too evasive. And he was free, for the time being, at least. The Monitors did nothing without reason. So the only answer was that he was bait. Small fry. They could afford to turn him loose in the hope that he would run for the others.

Greg moved slowly between the rows of grey, soot-stained buildings. This, he thought bleakly, was what failure felt like. For three years he had worked in the Mars Project. The Underground felt it important to have someone in the planned colony on Mars. But the watchdogs of the People's State had sniffed him out. The dream was finished.

The murky grey of the sky was deepening into dismal blackness as Greg reached the Square. The curfew hour had passed now and the streets were devoid to life. No citizen was allowed out after dark within the city. It was one of the trifling sacrifices, Greg thought drily, that the people made for the New Democracy.

ORDINARILY, Greg Ely would have been in his own smelly tenement room by this time, but his discharge from the Mars Project and his hopelessness was tempting him to petty defiance.

The Square was an analogy of the State, Greg thought as he looked out over the vast expanse of asphalt. The

pillboxes around the perimeter—covered with bright posters redundant with promises of plenty in some future date—did not quite hide the blunt muzzles of the electro-blasters within. It was here that the people paraded under the threat of instant death. The vastness of the Square was symbolic of the world-wide dominion of the State. And then the final irony. The Monument. An obelisk of black stone a hundred meters high, and atop this the huge figure of the Common Man, a monster spanner in his hand, and his blunt features raised toward the stars....

Greg stared at the mammoth figure. There was something in the yearning pose that struck a spark. An idea began to form. A defiant, impossible idea. The human mind is strange, Greg thought. Offer it freedom and then snatch it away and the mind begins to search. Eventually a plan takes shape. Even a wild, impossible sort of plan—but a *plan*.

The wind ripped away long strips of the cloudy sky and the looming colossus was etched in blackness against the faint stars. From across the Square came the faint wail of a siren. It was far away. The three headlamps of a gyrocar appeared and began to move swiftly across the asphalt toward Greg Ely. For a moment he connected the siren with the approaching car, but as the car drew near he realized that this was not so. The car approached in silence, and as it did so, its lights went dark.

Without quite knowing why, Greg began to run. Now that he had a plan there was a reason to keep fighting. He ran for the cover of a narrow alleyway, his breath coming hard and his pulse pounding.

He heard someone call to him from the dark gyrocar, but he did not slow down. Escape was the only important

thing now. He had a plan to substitute for his failure. He had something to offer Marsden and the others. Something to offer Elna....

He was still running when a low-power electro-bolt caught him and sent him sprawling in the street. Paralysis held him rigid as the dark gyrocar slowed—stopped. He felt many hands pulling him into the vehicle.

He heard someone say: "Hurry! The Monitors are coming!" Then he felt the silken acceleration of the car under him and heard the keening of the siren in the distance.

A protecting darkness folded itself about him as his synapses failed under the shock of the electro. Very slowly, he tumbled into a velvet abyss shot with fiery streaks...

HE AWOKE in a dingy room that might have been his own, but it wasn't. His head throbbed painfully from the after-effects of the electro-bolt and his limbs felt leaden.

He lay in a tenement somewhere. That much was certain. The smell of cooking food clung to the very walls and the faded threadbare bedclothes that covered him smelled of insect-powder.

The door opened and a girl entered. Ely felt his heart skip. It was Elna. His friends had picked him up—and the Monitors must have seen.

"I was so afraid for you, Greg," Elna said, "They had to hurt you to bring you here. Why did you run?"

Greg managed a wan smile. "I ran, that's all. Maybe I thought it was the Monitors."

Elna stood uncertainly beside him. In the dim light one could not see the lines of fatigue that marred her face, or the streaks of premature grey in her hair. Even the short singlet of rough denim that reached half-way down her thighs—the garb of a fac-

tory worker—became her. Her feet and legs were bare. Thin, too, Greg noticed with a pang. There was never quite enough food for the workers, and none could afford shoes except in the coldest part of the winter.

"Elna...." He sat up with an effort and caught her by the hand, pulling her to him. Suddenly his plan seemed more important than before. He held her tightly, feeling her gaunt, work-hardened body against his. Freedom for Elna was more important than freedom for himself. He was almost glad the primary plan had failed.

Presently Marsden came in and Greg released Elna reluctantly.

"I see you've recovered," Marsden said drily.

"We can't stay here, Marsden," Gregor said, "Monitors were following me when you picked me up." —

"I know."

"How long have we?"

"Ten minutes, perhaps. Maybe more."

"Have they picked anybody up?"

"Moulder and Warnecke."

"Then I talked," exclaimed Ely bitterly.

"They gave you a narco?" Marsden asked.

"Yes. I must have babbled plenty. The mnemonic blocks didn't work. Why?"

Marsden shrugged. "That happens sometimes. You can build up only so much resistance to narco synthesis. When your limit of tolerance is reached—you talk."

"Could they have implanted a post-hypnotic suggestion?"

"It's possible, though not likely. Why?"

For a moment Ely thought in silence. It was not beyond the realm of possibility that his plan was the product of a Monitor psych's brain. But he had talked under the narco. They had to chance it. He knew all the im-

portant members of the Underground—and now he had let himself be rescued. Therefore the Monitors couldn't be far off. It was act now—or die.

"They'll have all of us by tomorrow, you know," he said, trying to keep his voice steady. "Why did you pick me up?"

MARSDEN smiled bleakly. "We had to take the chance. You're the only rocket expert we have." He shrugged. "At that we almost had to kill you. Everything's fouled up now. You being in the Mars Project was our last hope. There was nowhere else to turn. So—" He broke off abruptly, his eyes hard. "We can use the arms cache to make a stand in the storm drains. It won't prove anything, but at least we can take some of those swine to perdition with us."

"Then everyone is resigned to making a fight of it?"

"Yes. What else is there left to do?"

"All right," Ely said, "That fits in. I have a plan. As long as there's no other way out, we may as well make the fight count for something."

"Meaning what?" asked Marsden.

"Meaning we try to steal the rocket."

"What?"

"It makes sense, Marsden. Listen. The Project Bureau has spent ten years building the spaceship for the try at Mars. That means another couldn't possibly be built in less than three years. They've set the launching date for next week—you didn't know that?"

"No."

"It has to be within a week either way of March 30. Tomorrow is the first day. And get this: *oppositions of Mars come only every fifteen years.*"

"Fifteen years!"

"Have you any idea what the possibilities are? Think, man! The rocket is intended to set up a colony. That

means it is fully provisioned and equipped. If we can get off tomorrow in it, we're *free!* There can be no pursuit for at least three years and most likely for *fifteen!*"

Marsden stared. His mind filled suddenly with a new vision of freedom. An Underground colony on Mars. It would have time to establish itself, time to plan a defense against the assault that would surely come from Earth and the People's State.

"But—even if we could pull this off," he protested, "What about pilotage? What about landing? There are a million problems."

"Don't split hairs, Marsden! I can handle the rocket controls. The landing is planned to be by parachute. It's been tested. It works, even in thin air. The rest of it can be worked out as problems arise. The important thing is getting the spaceship. And it will have to be tomorrow." He managed a bleak grin. "After all, Comrade, it is worth the try, don't you think?"

Marsden laid a hand on Greg's shoulder. "You say *you* will handle the rocket controls?"

"Yes." He searched Marsden's features. The older man's face was set. Marsden knew. Greg hurried on, throwing words into the breach. "Think what it will mean, Marsden. A colony of free men on a free world...."

Marsden looked at Elna. Greg wondered how much the girl knew. Nothing about the rocket, thank God. And Marsden wouldn't tell her.

"All right, Greg," Marsden said in a low voice. "I'll tell the others."

"Transportation?" Greg wanted to get the conversation away from the spaceship now. It was important that only he and Marsden know the joker in his plan.

"I'll attend to it."

"Tomorrow, then."

Marsden turned and started to leave.

At the door, he turned abruptly, and Greg had the feeling that he was going to spill everything to Elna. He opened his mouth to speak—but the sudden shrieking of a siren cut him off.

"Monitors!" Elna said.

"Stay together, you two," Marsden said, and then he gave a short, hard laugh that cut into Greg like a knife.

"Head for the storm drains. Meet us tomorrow at the weapons cache. I'll have cars there to take us all to the rocket base." Marsden looked again at Greg, "Good luck," he said, and was gone.

GREG PULLED himself painfully from the cot and donned his jumper. Then together, he and the girl slipped out into the grimy hallway. They had reached the stairway when the first gyrocar of Monitors arrived. Searchlights splashed the facade of the old building. The metallic voice of a public address system began warning the inhabitants to stay in their rooms. Cordons were being set up around the block.

Elna and Greg reached the street level and emerged out of a side entrance into a narrow, littered alleyway between buildings. She led the way to the blind end of the alley and began digging in the refuse. Greg lent his strength to the task, and soon a small manhole cover lay bare. He lifted it and stared for a moment into the stygian darkness of the pit.

They squeezed through and into the darkness. Greg replaced the cover and dropped to the damp concrete floor. The drain smelled wet and old, and from somewhere in the distance there came the sound of running water.

Elna slipped her hand into his and they moved forward, down the sloping tunnel. Greg produced a small torch from his jumper pocket and they moved along in a sphere of dim radiance.

New tubes joined theirs at intervals, and at each, Elna paused to inspect the numbers imbedded in the concrete. For what seemed hours, they walked along, through dark icy water that reached in some places to their waists.

At last they reached a rising side-tunnel that branched out of theirs. Elna inspected the numbers with care and led the way upward. Perhaps a hundred meters from the junction a caved in section blocked further progress. Here the girl stopped. A pile of blankets and a small cache of canned food lay in the corner. Greg sank wearily down onto the curving concrete. His head still ached from the after-effects of the electro-bolt and he was chilled to the bone.

Elna opened a can of food and they sat and ate in silence. They stripped off their wet clothes and wrapped up in blankets. Greg felt suddenly very tired. He lay back and wearily closed his eyes.

He must have slept for a short time, for when he opened his eyes again, the light was out and Elna lay at his side. He reached out and touched her. Her hair was coarse and dry under his hands, her flesh rough. She sighed contentedly and moved closer to him, whispering faintly in her sleep. Greg felt a tightness in his throat. She was a simple creature. She wanted only freedom—and Greg. As simple as that. But nothing came without a price tag. Ely closed his eyes and tried to force the bleak thoughts out of his mind.

Greg stretched out and let his tired muscles relax. Presently he slept, and he dreamed of low red hills under a cobalt sky. Greg Ely dreamed of Mars....

NIGHT WAS falling as Ely and Marsden topped the ridge that faced the guarded launching site. The

others of the Underground were behind them, a pitifully small group of armed men and women spaced out among the scrubby bushes that grew on the slopes. They had come out of the city by gyrocar, twenty men and fifteen women. Now, with pounding heart, Greg was leading them forward toward the rocket field.

The weight of the automatic rifle was unfamiliar on his back, and his head still ached painfully, but Greg felt a savage excitement quicken the blood in his veins.

The field was flood-lighted and Marsden and Greg could see the spaceship clearly. Some quirk of memory likened the slender projectile to the Monument in Greg's mind. Both seeking the freedom of the stars—but only one destined to have the chance.

The field was guarded by spaced gun-towers and a fence of charged wire. Electro-blasts were mounted in the towers, and much of Greg's plan of assault depended on them. His eyes narrowed as he saw the open door to the Central Control pillbox. A green-clad Monitor was lolling there, smoking carelessly.

"You take the main body and wait under cover near the main gate," Greg told Marsden. "Give me two grenades. When you hear one let go up here, rush the gates. The current in the fence will be dead. Rush the ship. Never mind anything else. Get everyone in the ship and close the valves. I'll take care of the rest." He saw that Marsden was about to protest and he cut him off curtly. "This is important, Marsden. Remember, I'm willing to do my part. You should be willing to do yours."

"All right," Marsden said, "I'll send the grenades up." He turned away and inched his way back to where the rest of the rebels waited. Shortly, Greg saw Elna crawling up

the slope with the grenades. She wore an electro-blast around her waist, and her face had been blackened with soot.

"The grenades, Greg," she whispered, "Will they be enough?"

"Plenty. Did Marsden pass the rest around?"

The girl nodded.

"Good. Now—" He hesitated. This was the hard part of it. "You go back with the others," he said.

"I want to go with you," she replied simply.

"Please. Go back, Elna." He looked long into her face, memorizing every feature. This would have to last a long time. He looked away quickly. Perhaps not so long at that. "Go on now, Elna. We'll have time together later." The words almost stuck in his throat.

"A lifetime," she said softly. She kissed him, smudging his face with soot. Then she was gone. He closed his eyes tightly, not wanting to see her go. When he opened them again there was nothing but the silent slopes and the silvery shape of the spaceship.

Greg inched his way down the slope toward the charged fence. He reached the cleared area before being discovered, and then, as the roving searchlight found him, he broke into a run for the charged wire. Just short of it he stopped, unslinging his rifle and loosing a barrage of slugs at the watchtower.

His plan worked. Under attack, the Monitors acted rashly. They swung the electro-blast around. Greg cringed inwardly, but he held his ground. The wire fence was between him and the belled muzzle. He watched the nimbus of fire form and leap toward him. He could not help closing his eyes, but the bolt struck the charged fence and shorted. A half-million volts surged into the wire and it glowed cherry-red. There was a flash and the stench of ozone and the wire melted. The fence was down.

GREG LEAPED forward and pulled the pin from a grenade. It arced toward the watchtower and exploded into a blossom of murky fire. The watchtower collapsed in a rain of debris.

An answering blast from down the line told him that Marsden was beginning his attack. He began to run toward the launching ramp. A gyrocar cut out of the confusion of the base and came sweeping toward him. He met it with a fusillade of armor-piercing slugs from his rifle and it tumbled as the projectiles shattered the fly-wheel. Greg had a fleeting glimpse of white, agonized faces within as the shards of the gyro slashed through the car's occupants.

Suddenly the field went dark. Either the Monitors had cut off the power to confuse the attackers or Marsden had blasted the generating station. That was bad. Power was needed to launch the rocket.

Tracers and electro-bolts lit the darkness. A siren began a belated wailing. Shots crackled all along the line as the surprised Monitors raked the surrounding hills with their deadly fire.

Greg ran toward the ramp, his last grenade in his hand, the heavy rifle thumping on his back. He was almost there when the emergency power came on and lights etched the confusion against the pressing night.

Overhead a jetplane roared. The Monitors had already called for help from the city. There was little time left. Greg gave a shout of triumph as he saw that Marsden, under cover of the brief darkness, had succeeded in getting the rebels aboard the spaceship. The last of them was filing into the valve high up amid the maze of scaffolding.

A searing blast caught the end of the queue and cooked it. Greg looked

around to see a light field-projector levelling for another shot. He pulled the pin from his last grenade and threw it. The blaster and its crew erupted in a ball of greasy flame. The valve on the spaceship's flank closed.

Now there was one thing left to do, and it was up to Greg alone. He ran for the pillbox, his rifle spitting steel, raking the nearby buildings.

A burly Monitor guessed his intention and moved in to block him. Greg cut him down with a burst. He was nearly to the pillbox now, and two more Monitors started toward him. He sprayed them with slugs until the gun went silent. Empty.

An air bomb exploded near the spaceship with an earth-shaking roar. Greg felt his heart sink. The Monitors were willing to destroy the ship itself rather than let it be stolen.

Greg dived for the pillbox just as a blast from some unseen rifle caught him in the small of the back and spun him around. Pain almost blinded him. He staggered erect and into the concrete box. He slammed the steel door shut and turned toward the banks of switches. His jumper was soaked with blood and he felt darkness plucking at him. He had to stay on his feet at all costs!

A sullen roar began under the rocket. Flickers of flame splashed against the ramp, eating away the flimsy scaffolding. A bomb fell nearby and the control room rocked, the steel door sagging on its hinges,

The fire grew brighter. The spaceship stirred, lifted. Greg could feel the vibrations and the heat of the tail-blast. The radarscope brightened. The spaceship was well up now, rising through a lattice of tracer-fire with agonizing slowness. Greg punched keys on the computers rapidly, fighting his failing strength. At last it was done, the course set.

(Concluded On Page 194)

The GLOVES



To its owner and victims alike, the gloves seemed to possess an evil entity . . .

of GINO

By P. F. Costello

**These were unique gloves: they gave
ruthless power to one man--and revenge
to the woman he had nearly destroyed...**

THE GLOVES were on the sidewalk at the edge of a pool of light cast by a street lamp. Gino Georgia saw them as he stepped out of the alley he used as a short cut on the way home from work.

He paused, glancing up and down the street, thinking cautiously that whoever had lost the gloves might still be sighted; but the street was a cold empty tunnel so he stooped and quickly stuffed the gloves into the pocket of his frayed jacket.

And then he hurried on toward his small rooms...

The air was biting cold and he was hungry, achingly hungry, but he hardly noticed the weather or his hunger because those things were always with him, as inevitably as his wife, his shabby crowded apartment, his helpless worry about money. Gino worked in a market twelve hours a day for twenty-eight dollars a week, and on that money a man became accustomed to cold and hunger and the

other inadequacies of life.

Three blocks from where he found the gloves he stopped and pulled them onto his chilled hands. They were the first leather gloves he'd ever owned, and he was delighted by their softness and quality.

The gloves were fawn-colored, well worn to a dull finish and beautifully stitched. Gino felt suddenly better for having them on his hands. They gave him a pleasurable feeling of importance.

Now, he thought, the maids who shopped at his market might look at him with some respect, instead of treating him as if he were a piece of equipment, like the great carving block, for instance. He smiled at that thought and lights appeared in the depths of his dark eyes.

Entering the tiled hallway of his apartment-building, he noticed with irritation that the floor was littered with old newspapers and that the woodwork was scratched and chipped

from the pencilled scrawlings of the neighborhood brats. It was never any different, of course; always dirt, dirt, dirt! But tonight it annoyed him strangely.

Normally he rang the bell three times to let Stella know he was on his way up, but tonight he fished out his key; and as he did, he noticed the gloves again and the way they flattered his hands. He turned his hands around and saw that his fingers were curled in the gloves so that his hands appeared to be grasping something—but what, he couldn't tell.

He fitted the key very carefully into the lock and turned it slowly, a fraction of an inch at a time, so that the ancient tumblers would not creak. When the lock opened he put his other hand on the knob and turned it with the same care until he could open the door, silently, stealthily.

Why he was behaving this way he didn't know. And it worried him slightly. But a glance at his gloves reassured him. Perhaps that was the reason he was moving with such grace and silence—because the gloves were so beautiful and full of dignity. He walked up the three flights to his two-room apartment and opened the door with the same peculiar stealth. In the kitchen he heard his wife, Stella, moving about preparing his dinner. She was humming a song.

Gino closed the door silently behind him and tip-toed to the kitchen. Stella was standing with her back to him stirring something on the stove and he watched her, smiling and gaining a secret thrill of excitement from the knowledge that she was unaware of his presence.

She was a tall, broad-shouldered girl with black hair and thick sensual lips. They had been moderately happy the first year of their marriage; but then their relationship had become static and lusterless.

Watching her, it occurred to Gino how defenseless people were when they thought they were alone, unwatched. Stella was relaxed and confident, stirring the dinner, humming her song, rubbing her hand now along her ample hip. But when he spoke to her, she would wheel, surprised, terrified. Her assurance would be destroyed with a word.

This, Gino realized, was a strange way for him to be thinking. But nevertheless his new bit of knowledge gave him a pleasant sense of power. He had said Stella's name thousands of times and it had never affected her at all. But now, because he had entered silently, he was in a new and important position.

Grinning, he said, "Hello!"

HER REACTION was swift and gratifying. Twisting, she stared at him, suddenly white-faced and frightened; then she let out her breath and turned back to the stove with an angry shake of her shoulders.

"Damn it, you scared me," she said. "How come you didn't ring?"

"I thought I'd surprise you."

"Well, don't play no more tricks like that. I damn near knocked your dinner on the floor and it would have served you right."

"You don't like being surprised?" Gino said.

"I told y a. It scared me."

"Oh," he said. He took off his jacket and his cap, then sat at the table, still wearing his new gloves. "I shouldn't think a wife would mind being surprised by her husband. Not if she's got nothing to be afraid of."

"What do you mean by that?" She turned from the stove, flushing. "What kind of a crack is that?"

"Nothing to get excited about," he said, shrugging. "But I don't see that your husband coming home is anything to be scared about."

"For God's sake, I told you twice, you come creeping in like a cat when I'm alone and it scared me. I got nerves like anybody else."

"Maybe you wouldn't be so scared if it was someone else," Gino said. He had no idea why he was pestering his wife this way; he didn't care what she did. But he enjoyed the look on her face. The blend of anger and surprise and fear.

"Gino, you're talking like I expect somebody else to come walking in here," she said, her voice rising. "What gave you ideas like that?"

"The way you acted, I suppose."

"How many times do I have to tell you I was startled," she said wearily. "You got something else on your mind? You think I'm playing around with some guy, is that it?"

"You're saying it, not me," Gino said, grinning.

She stared at him in confusion for a few seconds and then brought his food to the table and set it before him with an angry crash. Then she noticed his gloves.

"Where'd you get them?" she said, pointing.

"Don't worry about 'em," he said. "I got 'em, that's enough."

"You gonna eat with them on?" she said sarcastically.

Gino felt deflated. "I guess not," he muttered; but when he stripped off the gloves he was ill at ease and nervous.

Stella poured herself coffee, lit a cigarette, and sat down facing him with her elbows on the table. "Let's settle this other business," she said. "You got ideas about me, eh?"

"I was only kidding," Gino said. He felt defensive and uncertain now; and he didn't like the sensation. It was different when he wore the gloves, he realized with a touch of awe.

When he finished dinner he lit a cigarette and put the gloves back on; and then, to make the gesture natural,

announced that he was going out.

"Where?" Stella said sharply

"Just out," Gino grinned.

STELLA watched him leave with a puzzled frown on her face. Gino walked along the cold streets of the mean neighborhood he lived in, feeling exceptionally fine, and thinking strange thoughts. He was thinking that people were easy to handle when they were frightened. Later he stopped in at a drugstore and bought an evening paper. The black dramatic headline screamed that murder had been done.

Fascinated, Gino read the story and saw that the murder had been committed in a house he passed every day on the way to and from work.

A girl had been strangled to death in her bed room that night around supper time. Gino suddenly realized that his hands were trembling. Glancing down he saw that his fingers were curled oddly within the soft leather gloves. He didn't know why he was so excited; but it was not an unpleasant feeling.

He put the paper under his arm and walked into the street. The murder had been committed in the house that backed against the alley he had used that very night—and it was the house closest to where he had found the gloves!

Gino stopped under a street lamp and unfolded his paper. He read the murder story all the way through this time, even following it into the inside pages of the paper. And he came across a line that he had known, deep in his heart, he would find—a line that nonetheless brought the hairs up on the back of his neck.

"—there is proof that the murderer wore gloves, for a tiny strip of leather was found caught in a splinter on the window sill of the girl's room. It was obviously torn from the murderer's glove while he made his escape, de-

detectives." told reporters today—"

Gino dropped the paper and inspected the palms of his gloves; and in the center of the left one found a spot where a tiny strip of leather had been peeled away.

He stood stock-still in the cold empty street staring at his gloved hands, watching with fascination as fingers curled strongly and his thumbs spread out in the menacing strangler's gesture. In his mind, white-hot and vivid, he saw the scene that had been played that night—the girl, slim, unaware, resting as the dark figure moved with the swiftness of a panther; and the scream that never sounded, that was cut off by strong curling fingers, blunt pressing thumbs, and then the slender limbs twisting and the eyes bulging in terror as the dark figure tightened the grip and laughed low in its throat.

Gino shook his head to clear his mind, then started for his home, walking swiftly. He wore the gloves of a murderer and inside him something was pounding strongly, exultantly.

THE NEXT day an interesting incident occurred at the store; an incident very significant to Gino.

He was at the cash register when a buxom Swedish girl put a basket of groceries on the counter along with a ten-dollar bill. Gino had come in from the street a few seconds before and was still wearing his new gloves. He felt somehow very superior to this cloddish maid as he totalled the purchases and rang up the amount on the register. Then, as he reached for a five dollar bill to make change, he paused involuntarily, noticing his hands. They were not obeying him, he thought with a tiny thrill of excitement. They were hovering over the small change sections of the register and before he knew what was happening they had scooped up a dime and a nickel.

The maid was staring vacantly at a cereal display in which a handsome young man was winking out over a bowl of wheat flakes. Gino handed her the fifteen cents.

"Thank you," he said.

"Wait a minute," the girl said. "I gave you a ten."

Gino looked perplexed. Then he smiled. He felt very sure of himself as he saw the first shadow of doubt touch her face.

"I think you're mistaken," he said pleasantly.

"No," the maid said stubbornly. "I was given ten dollars for shopping this morning. It was ten, I know."

Gino said, "I'll check the register, of course." Smiling, he added: "Your mistress would raise the devil if you lost five dollars, eh?"

The girl seemed frightened now. "She'd be awfully mad. But it was a ten I gave you."

"We'll know in a moment," Gino said.

He was thinking with amusement how vulnerable people were when they became frightened. And he realized that everyone was afraid of something. Find out what it was and you had them. This poor girl was scared now of her employer's wrath, of losing her job; and soon her fear would make her incapable of knowing whether she'd given him ten dollars or a hundred. But the manager of the store, a tight-faced little man with scanty black hair, came on the scene then and demanded to know the trouble. Hearing the girl's story he glared suspiciously at her. "You sure it was a ten?"

"Yes, I'm sure, I'm sure," the girl wailed.

"Humph! Well, check the register, Gino."

Now Gino was in a spot. The register was five dollars out of balance—in the girl's favor. Normally Gino would have been terrified. But now he

felt nothing but contempt for the girl and the manager. Both frightened to death over five dollars.

He ran a balance of the register and then began to count the cash. Without any particular attempt at concealment he slipped a five dollar bill inside his glove. The girl and the manager saw nothing. Their fear made them blind, Gino thought gleefully.

The register balanced to the cent, of course. Gino stared at the girl. "You still sure it was a ten?"

"It must have been," she said desperately.

"Humph!" the manager said and walked away.

"Go to your employer," Gino told the girl sternly. "Tell her she gave you a five instead of a ten."

That was good advice, he knew now. All this clod had to do was frighten her mistress, and she wouldn't remember what she'd given her. It was all so simple, Gino thought with a touch of wonder.

That night he took his dinner in an Italian restaurant that featured classical musical and Chianti at reasonable prices. After a heaping platter of veal *Scallopine* with a side order of spaghetti, Gino settled back to enjoy the loud jingling melodies of Verdi and Donizetti. He smoked a cigar and drank glass after glass of the cold dry wine.

This was the way a man should feel, thought Gino. Relaxed and comfortable, heavy-lidded with fine food and wine, while listening to the great music of the Italian operas.

A newsboy came in and he bought a paper eagerly. The murder of the young girl was still front page news. There was a picture of her, a slim blonde dressed in an evening dress, face turned from the camera in a typical graduation-day pose. Gino's eyes froze on the slender white throat. He smiled after a bit and drank a glass-

full of wine, and then drew on his gloves.

Holding the paper before him he stared again at the girl's throat, and then his hands came together suddenly, powerfully, fingers curling cruelly, and the paper was crushed to a tight wad within his grip...

STELLA was sitting in a shabby over-stuffed chair in the living room when he came in. She stared at him as he took off his jacket.

"Your supper is cold," she said.

"Good," he grinned. "Throw it out."

"So you're a millionaire and don't need food anymore, eh?" She sniffed and said: "You been drinking, too."

He still felt good. "Yeah, I had a couple a bottles of wine to go with the spaghetti. And a cigar, if you want the complete menu."

She stood up angrily. "So you been eating and drinking like a king while I sit home with slops. Don't you think I could use a little extra to run the house on?"

Gino faced his wife, smiling. She was angry and that wouldn't do. He was learning that angry people are hard to handle.

"I don't want to hear any more about it," he said quietly.

"My, we're a real big shot now, aren't we?" she said, with heavy sarcasm. "Where did you get the money for eating in a restaurant. Just tell me that."

He caught her wrist suddenly and jerked her around and then, as she struggled furiously, he twisted her arm sharply.

She gasped with pain. "What's the idea, Gino?" she cried, fear in her voice. She was accustomed to his casual brutality, the exasperated blows and slaps; but she didn't understand this deliberate cruelty. And Gino knew suddenly that what people didn't

understand they usually feared. He was almost in awe of the things that were coming into his head, and at the rate he was learning the facts of life.

"I asked you to shut up," he said to his wife. "Understand?"

He twisted her arm until she began to whimper and then he released her and sat down in the big chair. She stood looking down at him, eyes swollen with tears, massaging her arm with the tips of her fingers. "You got no right to treat me like that, Gino," she said. There was a deep anger in her, still, but the fear was greater. "I try to do like you want."

"That's good," he said. "When you don't I'll let you know about it."

He opened the paper then to read the murder story again and forgot about Stella...

THE NEXT morning she shook his shoulder at six o'clock. He rolled over and stretched luxuriously. Outside it was still dark and a cold bitter wind was howling against the window. Gino burrowed deep into the warm blankets and closed his eyes.

"Gino, you gotta go to work," Stella said.

"Don't bother me," he said.

"It's time to get up," she said, tugging at his blankets.

He opened one eye and glared at her. "You need a reminder you're bothering me."

Unconsciously her hand moved to his shoulder. "No, I don't need nothing, Gino." She went out and closed the door.

Gino rose at ten o'clock and took a leisurely bath, shaved with care and put on his one good suit. He found Stella in the kitchen mopping the floor.

"I'll have breakfast now," he said.

"What are we going to do if you don't work," she said sullenly.

"I'll take care of that. Get break-

fast. I don't like to ask twice."

Eating, he made his plans. He had a daring idea but he wasn't scared. He had learned a great deal in the last thirty-six hours. He had learned the secret of success. He felt like laughing aloud as he watched Stella moping around the kitchen.

Finished with breakfast he put on his overcoat, the garment he wore Sundays in place of his jacket, and then slowly drew on his fine leather gloves. He smiled at them, studying the noble grain of leather and the beautiful stitching. The gloves knew the secret too, he thought, as his fingers curled under the skin-like layer of leather.

"What do you stare at them gloves all the time for?" Stella said; she had been watching him from the kitchen door.

"Because I like 'em." He went out grinning.

Gino stopped at the bar he spent time in when he had a little extra money. There was a dart board, a juke box, and booths in the back. It was also the hangout of the neighborhood bookie, a man named Al. Al was slender, with graying hair and good clothes.

Gino had a beer and talked with the bartender for a while. Then Al came in and ordered a drink. He nodded to Gino and the bartender while folding the first edition of the paper to the race results. Gino watched him from the corner of his eye. The bookie's eyes were the color of steel in freezing weather. For an instant Gino's confidence deserted him; but then he glanced down at the gloves on his big, curled hands, and smiled secretively.

He said, "Al, could I talk to you a second? In back."

Al studied him a moment, then shrugged. "Why not?"

He told the bartender to bring him a whisky. He could have ordered one

for Gino but he didn't bother. He didn't buy drinks or lend money. That wasn't his business.

They sat down, facing each other across a scarred table-top; Gino's big bulk filled his half of the booth.

He said, "I quit my job today, Al."

The bartender brought the whisky and put it on the table. Al picked it up and took a sip of the liquor. "So?"

Gino grinned. "No money in it; I had to work like a horse. I want something easier where I get some real dough."

"Everybody does," Al said. "Why tell me about it?"

"I figure you could help me," Gino said. "You got a nice racket. How do you get started as a bookie?"

"Get in with the syndicate, get about ten thousand dollars capital and a string of customers. That's all."

"I'm looking for a short cut," Gino said, glancing down at his big relaxed hands. They were curled as if they were holding something loosely, carelessly. "I thought you might take me in with you, Al."

"I ain't the Red Cross," Al said. "You got nothing I want."

GINO STARED thoughtfully into Al's hard narrow face, noting the cold eyes, the cunning mouth, the lean strong jaw. This man wasn't afraid. That's why he was bold, confident. It was that simple. So what Gino had to do was equally simple.

His gloved hands shot quickly, fastened around the bookie's throat. He jerked the smaller man toward him until his chest pressed tightly against the table edge and their faces were only inches apart.

The music was loud and the place empty. The bookie tried to jerk Gino's hands from his throat but there was power beneath those leather gloves. Working like a horse had given Gino the muscles of a horse.

Al's face reddened.

"Now I got something you want," Gino said softly. "I got air. You want some air, eh?"

He released the pressure to let Al suck in a gasp of air. Then his fingers tightened again.

"You cut me in or you get no more air," he said, very quietly. "You've had it nice a long time. Money, dames, cars, good food and clothes. Gino's been wearing an apron all that time, being ritzed by crummy maids and eating slops. I want some of the good stuff now, Al. You think I won't get it, eh? Well, how about it? You want some air? I got all the air in the world and you ain't got a thimbleful. Wha' cha say?"

Al tried frantically to nod his head. His eyes were bulging and a crazy hammering was exploding in his brain. Gino let him take a breath.

"You gone crazy?" Al gasped.

"I've gone smart," Gino snapped. "I can put you away and be in the clear, you know. I'll break your neck like it was a toothpick, then take that knife you carry and put it in your hand. I'll tell the cops you went for me. You ain't exactly loved, you know. So if you want to live, make me an offer. But fast."

Al wet his lips and Gino applied the pressure cruelly. "I ain't kidding, sonny boy."

When he let Al go this time he saw that it was going to be okay. Al was white and shaking with terror. The once-strong jaw was slack and the icy gray eyes were watering painfully.

"You're in," he gasped.

Gino sat back grinning hugely. "You can buy me a drink then, partner. And don't look so unhappy. You made a good deal."

EVERYONE in the neighborhood was surprised that Gino Georgia became Al's partner. He didn't know

much to start; but he learned fast. He cleared two hundred dollars the first week and bought a new suit and a gabardine topcoat. He didn't tell Stella where he got the money.

Al caused no trouble. He was afraid of Gino, thought him crazy and dangerous. That was fine too.

After a month Gino was doing much better. He told Stella they were going to move.

"This flea trap is getting on my nerves," he said.

She turned from the stove. "Where you getting all the money?"

"Don't worry about it."

"I won't live with a thief."

"You'll do anything I tell you," he said. It was good to have her around. She was a constant reminder of what you could do to people when they were thoroughly frightened. Once Stella had been a scrappy person; she'd even thrown a tray of ice cubes at him one night. But that was all over. She crept around like a shadow now, staring at him nervously.

They moved into a good apartment in a better neighborhood.

Gino kept the gloves with him all the time. They gave him strength and boldness; and they seemed to make decisions for him, the ruthless violent decisions that were necessary in his work.

Shortly after they moved a terrifying thing happened to Gino. By then he had bought out Al and had two men working for him. He was standing in a bar when a man who had lost too much money to him staggered in, drunk and dangerous. His red-rimmed eyes met Gino's, and his lips twisted savagely.

"The big shot," he said, sneering. "The leech that gets fat on the rest of us. Well, I ain't contributing any more, see?"

"That's okay," Gino said.

The man came closer. "You're damn

right it's okay. And if it wasn't, what would you do?"

Gino glanced down and saw with sudden fear that his hands were bare. He patted the pockets of his coat but the gloves weren't there; and he remembered that he'd left them on the hall table in his new apartment.

"We got nothing to argue about," he said to the man, smiling, and cursing inwardly at his nervously pounding heart.

"You're a cheap fake," the man said. "A cheap windbag, Gino."

Conversation had stopped in the bar and the men—Gino's friends and customers—were watching the scene speculatively.

Gino wet his dry lips and smiled feebly. "A great sense of humor you got," he said.

"You think I'm kidding?" The man laughed. "That's hot. Look, tinhorn, blow, hit the road. I'm tired of your dumb face."

Gino left his change and his drink and hurried out of the bar and his insides writhed at the derisive laugh that exploded as the door swung shut. This could be the end of everything for him, the finishing, he thought in an agony of fear.

He hailed a cab and returned to his apartment. Flinging open the door he ran to the hall table and jerked on the gloves. His breath was coming harshly and there was a gleam of terror in his eye.

The gloves fixed that miraculously, as the morphine needle soothes the junky's taut, screaming nerves.

Gino sighed gratefully as his confidence returned in a surging wave. His breathing slowed to normal and he straightened his shoulders and moved toward the door. It was then he saw that Stella was standing in the archway to the living room, watching him with narrowed eyes.

"What're you spying on me for?" he snarled.

Her eyes were on his gloves. She backed away from him, her hands unconsciously moving to her breast. "You're going crazy, Gino," she said.

He laughed strongly and happily. "Don't bet on it," he said, and rushed out the door.

THE MAN who had insulted him was bragging about his exploit when Gino reentered the bar with springy, cat-like strides.

A hush fell over the room, and the man, turning, said, "You forgot what I told you already, you crum?"

"Filth!" Gino said in an icy voice, and charged forward, his gloved hands curling into savage hooks.

Afterward, when the man had been taken away to a hospital, badly hurt, Gino glared about at the men in the barroom, his black eyes snapping arrogantly.

"Don't laugh at me," he said. "Ever!" Then he threw a bill on the bar and ordered drinks for everybody...

But the episode haunted his dreams, robbed him of the delight he expected from his money and power. What was the power of the gloves? He sat up late at night staring at them, flexing and unflexing his fingers inside them, watching the light play on the fine leather.

Then one day a solution occurred to him. He looked up Psychiatrists in the classified directory; found one with a ringing Italian name, and wasted no time at all in presenting himself at his office.

Dr. Rinaldi's nurse was amazed at Gino's demand to see the doctor immediately, but she said, "I'll see if he's busy at the moment."

Dr. Rinaldi came out of his office, a tall, handsome man in his early for-

ties. He smiled at Gino. "This the fellow who can't wait even five minutes to see me?"

"That's right," Gino said, jumping to his feet. "I gotta see you right away, Doc."

"Okay, come on in."

The doctor's office was a quiet, restfully decorated room, with a deep rug, a desk and several comfortable leather chairs. Dr. Rinaldi sat at the desk and lit a pipe. He waved Gino into one of the leather chairs.

"Now what is it? What's bothering you?" he said.

Gino leaned forward, his big, gloved hands clenched tightly together. "I don't want no long drawn-out business," he said. "I'm okay, see? Everything about me is fine, except one little thing. I want that fixed up and fast. I got money, don't worry."

Dr. Rinaldi laughed good-naturedly. "I'm not an automobile mechanic, and you're not a car. I can't fix one part of you like *that*," he snapped his fingers. "While you wait. But supposing you tell me what this one thing is?"

Gino looked down at his gloved hands miserably. "It probably won't make any sense to you," he muttered. "But when I'm wearing these gloves I feel fine and strong. But without them I'm nothin'."

"Where did you get the gloves?" Dr. Rinaldi asked casually.

"What's that got to do with it?" Gino snapped, flaring up.

"It may be important, and, to judge from your reaction, I'd guess it is highly important."

"I found them," Gino said.

"I see. Do you know who owned them?"

Gino stood up and paced the floor in a turmoil. He clenched and unclenched his hands and finally wheeled to the doctor and cried: "Forget about the gloves, see? They don't mean

nothin'. I'm the one you gotta fix; not the gloves."

"I don't see how I can help you," Dr. Rinaldi said. "You must talk with me and give me your confidence, or we're wasting each other's time."

"All right," Gino burst out. "The gloves were worn by a murderer. When I put 'em on I get strong. I can kill too. I'm tough, see? I'm Gino Georgia. I got four handbooks operating on the West side and I make more in a week than you do in a month."

"I doubt it," Dr. Rinaldi said drily. "My father was a meat packer and I have a private income that runs into six figures every year. But that is slightly beside the point, don't you think?"

"Yeah, I guess so," Gino muttered. "But why should these gloves work on me, Doc? They ain't human, they're leather and thread."

"It's a curious point," Dr. Rinaldi said. "It's correct and fashionable to assume that inanimate objects have no life of their own, but I'm a cautious man and I sometimes wonder. We give objects a certain kind of existence and life by the nature of the relationship we establish with them. The early Doctors of the Church with their bell and book and mystic incantations are not taken seriously today, but who can really say whether or not they were effective? We don't exorcise trees and bushes today; but that might be because the job was done for us by the early saints."

The doctor drew on his pipe until it was belching like a tiny volcano. Then he said: "We all know of men who raise inanimate objects to positions of great regard. Gamblers have lucky tokens, soldiers cherish certain things which they believe saved their lives. And who knows, maybe the lucky tokens *are* lucky, and the soldier's fetish *did* save his life."

"What are you getting at?" Gino said.

Dr. Rinaldi looked at the young man who stared tensely at him, noting the diamond-hard eyes, the cruel mouth and strong coarse features.

"You've got into a dangerous relationship with those gloves. You say they were worn by a murderer, and that they make you strong. Basically your attitude is unhealthy, dangerous. I'd suggest you get rid of them."

"You're crazy," Gino said. "I can't get along without 'em. That's why I came to see you. You're a quack!" he shouted, suddenly enraged; and jerked open the door and strode from the office.

GINO SOLVED the problem himself with ease a few days later. He chuckled at the simplicity of his plan. He practised going without the gloves a few hours at a time, particularly when he was with Stella. He could always frighten her now, with or without the gloves on, and he practised on her, building up his confidence slowly. Then he ventured to his haunts without the gloves in brief trips, until he could get along without them for an entire day.

Meanwhile his star continued to rise. One day he was sitting in a bar when three mobsters walked in. One of them, Big Foot Maguire, ran the town. He said, "If you're Gino Georgia I'd like to talk with you."

Gino nodded to the empty chair at his table. He wasn't afraid. He wasn't wearing his gloves, but that made no difference. Big Foot Maguire said, "You're younger than I thought. You haven't been around long either. Six months ago you were nobody. Now all I hear from the West Side is Gloves Georgia."

"Yeah?" Gino said. "Don't you like that?"

"I like it fine," Maguire said. "That's why I'm here. How'd you like to take over the West Side for me, numbers, dope, protection, everything."

Gino smiled. "Supposing I don't."

"Well, I don't like guys who don't want to work for me," Maguire said. "I could cause trouble."

"So could I," said Gino. "But it ain't my nature. Consider me in."

With that he became one of the wheels of the city's underworld. He had a cream-colored convertible, closets full of fancy clothes, and when he sauntered into a night spot with four or five of his men at his back, headwaiters snapped into action to get him the best table.

One night Gino met a blonde singer, a girl named Linda, who had a slim exciting body and hair that fitted her small head like a graceful aluminum cap. She was fair and lovely but her eyes were wiser than her baby-fresh face.

He asked her to sit with him one night and his men drifted away from the table. She sipped champagne and smiled innocently.

"You're okay," he told her. "I like you. How'd you like to be a real chum of mine, with no other worries but making me happy?"

"I get what you mean," Linda said, "But thanks and no, thanks. I like playing the field. I wouldn't like being shut away in an expensive upholstered jail."

He smiled and noted appreciatively the lovely curves of her body, the smoothness of her throat and her large blue eyes. This was a blonde toy—the one thing that he wanted now.

"I can be a good guy," he said quietly.

She leaned close to him, smiling. "You're a punk, Gino. A gutter-born punk."

Gino slapped her viciously across the face with the back of his hand. The blow knocked her out of the chair. She leaped to her feet, white-faced and sobbing. "You filthy no-good crum, I'll see you burning in hell for that."

Two husky young men from an adjoining table came over quickly and one of them said, looking at Gino, "This guy hit you, lady?"

"Yes," she shouted. "That's the kind of guts he's got. Goes around slapping women."

One of the men said to Gino. "You'd better get up, mug, if you don't want to take it sitting down."

"Beat it, schoolboy," Gino grinned, as his men closed in and shoved the two young men away from his table. The manager hurried over to apologize.

Gino waved a hand. "Forget it. She's a little excited. Better give her a rest, if you know what I mean."

"Of course."

IT TOOK Gino a month to get Linda. He had her fired from three jobs and chased a couple of young guys who were interested in her. One of them was persistent, so two of Gino's men worked him over so thoroughly that his mother wouldn't know him; he didn't show anymore.

Then they had another talk. "We'll make it a business deal," Gino said, smiling at her. She wasn't so cocky now. She was tired and scared. The old rules always worked, Gino thought to himself contentedly. Get people scared and they couldn't help themselves. "I'll take good care of you. You may even get to like me. ..."

He had a lot of fun with Linda. It was nice having such a pretty toy. He set her up in a duplex apartment and moved his headquarters there. Stella knew what was going on, of course. Gino told her.

"Let me go then, Gino," she pleaded with him that night. "I'm no good to you. I just sit in this empty apartment all day and worry so much I'm losing my mind. Please let me go."

"Don't annoy me," he said. "You got it good."

"You got another girl. You never see me anymore. Why do you want me anyway?"

He grinned at her. "You remind me of something."

One afternoon he stopped in to see her and noticed immediately that she was more nervous than usual. When she was in the kitchen he stepped into the bedroom and found her packed suitcase under the bed. He smiled and ran his tongue over his lower lip.

When he left he called one of his men, gave him careful instructions. Then he went to the beautiful duplex and spent the afternoon listening to Verdi and Donizetti and drinking chilled Chianti. Linda's silken ankles were crossed in his lap and he patted them absently and smiled.

Finally the phone rang. "Yeah?" he said. He listened, "Where was she going?"

"She had a ticket for Chicago in her purse."

"Okay, you know what to do now."

"Okay, boss. You sure know how to handle a wife."

Gino smiled and put the phone back in place. He told Linda to turn up the volume on the record player. The Anvil Chorus was beginning and he liked it played loud.

A week later he let himself into Stella's apartment. She was lying on the bed, fully dressed, breathing heavily. He shook her shoulder, pulled back her eyelid. She was out, drugged.

Gino got into the opposite bed and fell asleep with a little smile on his face. He was awakened the next morning by a frantic fugging at his shoul-

der. He rolled over and smiled at his wife. She was on her knees by his bed, her eyes wide with terror. She was thinner and a muscle was jerking uncontrollably in her cheek.

"Gino!" she said hoarsely. "I was kidnapped. I been tied up in a dark room, for days. Gino, you gotta do something."

He sat up, reached for a cigarette. "That so?" he said, yawning.

"Gino, listen. These guys took me into a car and gave me something to knock me out. I damn near went crazy."

"What were you doing out on the street?" he asked gently.

"I was—" She stopped then, breathing hard. For a long moment she stared at him in horror. "Oh, I see, I see," she said in a whisper. "You was behind it, Gino. I thought it was your enemies. But it was you. You let them do that to me. Tie me up like a bundle of dirty clothes, damn near starve me for a week. You did that to me, Gino."

"Yeah, that's right," he said, nodding and smiling. "I don't want my wife running off, that's all."

Stella climbed to her feet and sat on her own bed, shivering. "Why do you hate me like this?" she whispered.

"That ain't it at all," he said. "You're a reminder to me, that's all."

Laughing, he went into the bathroom...

THAT MORNING he left his gloves at Stella's, in the bureau he used for the few things he kept there. They didn't go with the clothes he was wearing and he didn't need them anymore.

During the next month Gino worked hard. He took over a small section of the South Side and that caused trouble. Gino was out every night with his boys that month persuading various people to see his point of view.

There wasn't any time for Verdi or Linda. But when it was all over, Gino Georgia was bigger than ever and several of his competitors had disappeared. Now it was Gino and Big Foot Maguire who ran the town and it was an open question as to how long even Big Foot could last.

Gino was tired the night he called Linda and found she was out. That disappointed him. Restless, he decided to drop in on Stella. That would be a nice surprise for her, he thought smiling.

She met him at the door and he noticed that she was dressed differently. She was wearing a long ice-green dress with a long V cut in the skirt, and when she turned he saw her ankle-strap high-heeled sandals and a flash of her shapely white legs.

"Real classy," he said.

"Well, you gave me those charge accounts so I figure I might as well use 'em."

"Yeah, sure," he said. He followed her with his eyes as she put his coat away. "Maybe I'm interfering with your plans?" he said softly.

She shrugged. "I got nothing to do."

"Swell," he said, strolling into the living room. "Maybe we can have dinner, eh?"

"I've got plenty in. Would you like a drink first?"

"Sure, sure," he said, smiling.

She brought him a strong, ice-cold bourbon and soda. He relaxed deep in a low chair and stretched out his legs. "This is real nice, ain't it?"

"You're paying for it, you might as well enjoy it," she said.

Gino glanced around and saw that she had fixed up the place nicely. The furniture was light gray and the drapes were a vivid flowered print. There was a record player in one corner and a small bar in the other.

"I'll start dinner," she said.

Gino watched her leave the room with a slight frown. She was different, all right. He wondered if she was forgetting her lesson. That wouldn't do, of course. He'd check on that later.

He finished his drink and strolled around the room. To his surprise he found an album of Verdi records. He put them on the machine and stretched out again in his chair as the overture to Traviata swelled through the room.

Sipping his drink and listening contentedly to the music, Gino was thinking he should do this more often. Stella wasn't a bad kid, and tonight she looked fine.

When she called him for dinner he saw that the table was set with crystal and silver and two candles were burning. He grinned at the huge casserole of spaghetti and the wicker-wrapped decanter of Chianti at his plate.

"Boy, oh boy," he chuckled. "You remember my tastes, eh kid?"

THE DINNER and Chianti were wonderful. In the background Gigli was coasting beautifully over the high notes, and the sweetly tragic story of Traviata's lovers was coming to its climax.

Gino leaned back when he finished and dabbed at his mouth with a napkin. Stella hadn't eaten much, he noticed.

"Not hungry?"

"I'm all right."

He stretched his feet out beneath the table and settled back with a cigar. "You look kind of pale."

"I don't get out much," she said. Leaning forward, she said tensely: "How about it, Gino? Won't you let me go? I ain't no good to you or anybody, cooped up here, scared to death all the time."

Gino raised an eyebrow. "What you scared of? Don't I treat you good?"

"I'm scared of you, Gino," she said

softly, staring directly at him across the flickering lights of the candles. "I been scared of you for a long time. I lay awake nights afraid you'll come in, and all day my ears are straining for the sound of your key. When I go out I'm watching for your men. I ain't forgot what you did to me, Gino."

"Now that's too bad," he said.

"Are you going to let me go?"

He smiled at her and shook his head slowly. "No, I need you, baby."

"Need me? What for?"

"I need you to remind me how important it is to keep people scared," Gino said. "You're my guinea pig, kid. I learned everything from you, I guess. You was a tough scrappy kid once, and now look at you. You're washed up. I did that, not, because I hate you, but because I had to learn on somebody and you were handy."

He belched unexpectedly. The dinner was settling heavily on his stomach. He drank another glass of the cold dry wine, realizing he'd eaten too much spaghetti.

"I'll change the record," Stella said.

She went out and Gino sat staring at the candles. He cursed himself for being a pig and loosened his belt to ease the pressure.

Stella came back and Gino realized that the same record was playing.

"I thought—"

He stopped abruptly. Stella was standing at his side, staring down at him with an odd, amused smile on her lips. And on her hands were his leather gloves. He felt his heart lurch oddly.

"What's the idea?"

"You mean the gloves?" Stella said, smiling and turning her hands about slowly as if she were modelling the gloves.

"Why are you wearing them?" he

shouted, his voice suddenly shrill.

"I like them, Gino," she said, laughing suddenly. "I found 'em in your drawer the last time you was here. You left them, you know."

"Yeah, I left them," Gino said. He was breathing hard and fear was driving into him like a sharp hot knife. "Give them to me," he said hoarsely.

"I've been wearing them for about a month now," Stella said, meeting his eyes evenly. "They make me feel different. I can do things when I wear these gloves, Gino. I guess you know all about that."

"Give me my gloves," he cried. He tried to snatch them from her but his arms moved slowly, clumsily, and she backed away from him with a light laugh. Suddenly he realized that he was in pain.

"I'm sick, Stella," he gasped fearfully.

"Now isn't that too bad," Stella said. She studied him with a smile. "How do you feel?"

"Like a knife is being pushed into my stomach," he gasped. "I'm sick, I tell you. Get a doctor, for God's sake."

"Yes, you're sick, Gino," she said. "Very, very sick. No doctor could help you, Gino. You're dying."

"No!" he cried.

"Oh, yes you are. There was enough stuff in that Chianti to kill ten men, Gino. It came in a little bottle and the man I got it from wanted a lot for it. But I didn't mind. After all it was your money."

He fought for breath, fought to keep his eyes in focus. "Stella," he gasped. Fear was coursing through him now with the inevitability of a tidal wave. "My gloves, Stella, give me my gloves."

"Why sure, Gino," Stella said softly.

She smiled and pulled off the gloves; and then bunched them in one

hand and slapped them across his face.

"There," she said, and threw them at his feet.

Gino fell to the floor, his hands touching the gloves. He tried to work his fingers into them, knowing that they were his only hope, his only defense against the black awful fear

that held him in its pitiless grip.

Traviata's poignant story drew to a close as Gino's voice soared dramatically to a high note; but Gino Georgia knew nothing of that.

In the strange sudden darkness that surrounded him he knew nothing but fear.

THE END

WITHOUT INCIDENT

By
LESLIE PHELPS

Jerry dropped the slide-rule to his desk top. He leaned back and stretched, his mouth forming a cavernous yawn. Even electronic engineers become bored. He shook himself. What I wouldn't give for a month's vacation, he thought, I'd lay around for a week, just relaxing...

"Jerry!" J.B. rolled his ponderous bulk through the office door.

Jerry snapped erect. "What's up J.B.?" he asked, already knowing that work was in store.

The executive glanced at the wall clock. "Listen Jerry. You've got twenty-five minutes to grab a traveling bag and jump the Paris rocket. We've got that gas-turbine power plant on the Seine, you know, the one Clinton's been having trouble with. Well, I want you to do some supervising on the controls. They're having a hell of a time with LeClair. He's too damned inconsistent. Get going boy. I just videoed them. The office in Paris will be waiting. They'll see you in five hours."

Jerry was out of the office like a shot. Fifteen minutes later, his small traveling bag in hand, a couple of books, his inevitable slide-rule, he was on a heli-cab heading for the Los Angeles rocket port.

The port was swarm of activity as Jerry picked up his reserved ticket and headed for the boarding ramps. The long slim snout of the Paris-rocket, the *Notre-Dame* towered a hundred feet into the air.

Stewardesses were bustling about, assisting passengers into the accelo-seats, distributing clarimine to those who became ill from acceleration or to the novices. Jerry brushed away the proffered drug. He was an old-timer at this.

He felt the rocket quiver a few minutes later as the igniters were fired. The speaker blared: "Prepare for ascent... Prepare for ascent."

There was the roar of flaming jets and the giant hand of acceleration pressed Jerry tight against the pneumatic-hydraulic cushioned seat. Constricting bands fastened across his chest. As the rocket arced into the air, acceleration was cut though velocity mounted.

After a while Jerry gingerly unstrapped himself and wandered toward the lounge. Outside everything was silent save for the hiss of the freely falling machine heading

in an enormous arc for the dot that was the remote Parisian rocket port.

Shaky passengers, experienced ones, novices and old-timers, wandered about, headed for the observatory or the bar. Jerry chose the latter. He was sipping an old-fashioned and leaning comfortably against the plushy bar when a stewardess approached him. She seemed a bit agitated.

"Mr. McCrane?" she asked politely but nervously.

Jerry swung around. "That's me."

"Will you please come to Engineering?"

Jerry put down his drink and followed her. He entered the instrument-filled maze that was the nerve-center of the giant rocket. Dials and gauges and meters covered the wall. One side was faced with buttons and levers.

A tall spare man introduced himself. "I'm Captain Fleming," he said. "I have a favor to ask. We're in a bit of trouble. The electronic controls that operate the fuel feed pumps won't work. And we can't find the trouble. I called Base and they gave your name from the passenger manifest. Will you help?"

Jerry grinned. "I haven't much choice, have I?" He started to work immediately, tracing down the elaborate circuits. He knew that despite the calmness of the captain, he was very concerned. In an hour the pumps would have to start in order to feed the braking rockets. If not—well, the rocket would end up as a splintered compressed pile of sheet metal at the bottom of the Atlantic...

It was a half hour later when Jerry emerged, rumpled and sweaty from the maze of instrumentation that constituted Engineering. There was a triumphant smile on his face and the anxious Captain sighed his relief. Experimentally he touched the switch button and the whine of electric motors told him that everything was in order.

Jerry finally managed to make his way back to the bar over the voluble protestations of gratitude from the crewmen. To avoid panic word had not been released of the narrow escape, nor would it be. As far as the passengers were concerned the landing report would read as always: "Landing completed, Paris port, without incident..."

World Without Men

By Robert Moore Williams



The one factor certain to make the invasion a success was that the enemy brought with him an irresistible weapon



"Teach that man respect!" the queen ordered, and the curling lash of the whip licked out and caught the trooper painfully on the back

"THIS IS the problem, sir," the worried trooper said. "In this area during the past three weeks we have definite evidence that at least two other people have disappeared." His pointing finger indicated the area that he meant. "Your brother makes the third."

George Bartlett followed the line of the pointing finger. He and the trooper stood at the top of a bluff. Below them, a small river meandered in a huge semi-circle, creating a bottom land broken by cleared fields and clumps of trees. To the north, the tops

of the towers of the university buildings were visible. The vegetation was green with the coming of spring. Warm winds were blowing from the south. A robin was singing. The scene was peaceful, pleasant. In such a spot as this nothing really unpleasant could happen. Students from the university held picnics here. Lover's Leap was down that way. About the worst that could happen here was violent love-making on the warm spring nights. Yet something worse was happening here. At the trooper's words, a little finger of chill touched George Bartlett.

"Two other people have disappeared here? I hadn't heard anything of this."

"It hasn't been in the papers, yet. The first was a farm boy, Mike Westerville. His folks thought maybe he had run away from home. The second was a salesman. We got a report of a car parked beside the road and went out to investigate. We found the car and that was all. Nobody around anywhere that we could find. We traced the owner through the license plates, got in touch with his wife. His name was Ted Nolan but all his wife knew was that he wasn't home. From what she said, we got the impression it was all right with her if he stayed lost."

Under other circumstances, Bartlett might have been interested in this evidence of the war between sexes, that vast undeclared conflict that had been in progress since the beginning of time. He was a psychologist, on the staff of the University whose towers could be glimpsed back there in the distance. His field was the human mind, though it was in another field that he was still chiefly famous, the football field. Back there at that university the undergraduates still told glowing

stories of triple-threat man George Bartlett, the All-American who was also a Phi Beta Kappa. Part of the respectful attitude of this state trooper was due to the fact that he had seen Bartlett in action in too many gridiron battles to lack respect for the man, part of it was due to natural deference—you were just naturally deferent to a man as big and as alert as George Bartlett. Also Ed Gast, the state trooper, liked Bartlett. Most people did.

Bud had practically worshipped him. Bud was his younger brother.

"You are certain he came here before he disappeared?" Gast asked.

"I'm not positive of it," Bartlett answered. "I *think* so but I don't know for sure. He lived with me, you know, and he told me he was going to take a walk. He asked me to come along, said the weather was too nice to waste it digging around in books. I was busy and couldn't go along. He mentioned, as he left the apartment, that he was coming here. But that doesn't mean that he actually came here."

"And that was the last you saw of him?"

"Yes. That was yesterday afternoon. When he didn't come home for dinner last night, I assumed he was with friends. When he didn't come home by the time I turned in, I thought nothing of it. Maybe he had met a girl, maybe he was having a bull session with his pals. You don't worry about a college boy when he doesn't come home by midnight; in fact, you worry about him if he *does* come home too early. It was only this morning, when I discovered he hadn't come home at all and realized he hadn't called me, that I begun to worry."

He had called the hospitals, then Bud's friends, then the state police.

"You have no idea what happened to these other two people?" Bartlett asked.

"No idea at all," Gast answered.

"What investigation have you made?"

"All the investigation we could make, considering the few facts we had to go on. Only a couple of days ago we realized that both cases had one factor in common, that both people had disappeared in the same area. Now your brother makes a third."

"Have you searched the area?"

"Thoroughly."

"With what results?"

"With no results. The river is hardly deep enough to drown in, there are no sinkholes, no caves that you could get lost in. Also there are no bodies, or none that we were able to find. So far as we can tell, these people have just walked off the face of the earth."

THE TROOPER was a big man, accustomed to the dangers of his work. One day he might be chasing bank robbers, the next day he might be stopping speeding motorists. Whatever came along in the way of law-breaking, he had already seen it. But as he spoke, the tone of his voice said he didn't like this situation. Bandits, killers, he could face. But men walking off the earth—"One thing we did run into. A farmer said he had seen what looked like a small patch fog down there in the valley."

"Fog?"

"Yes. The odd thing was, the fog was isolate, it covered an area of less than a acre. It was out in the open. And it was the only patch of fog anywhere around."

Bartlett was silent. There seemed to be no danger in fog. Or none that he could see. The land was low and fog often formed in lowlands. But a patch

of fog—

"The sun was shining, the farmer said," Gast continued. "Usually you don't see fog when the sun is shining."

"And usually you don't see a single small patch of it. Anything else about this fog?"

"Not much. The farmer said he couldn't see through it. He also said he heard, or thought he heard, a high whistle coming from it. Sort of like an inaudible dog whistle, he claimed, the kind that dogs can hear but that humans can't. He thought that was what it was, because now he seemed to hear it and now he didn't."

"Radiation just above the highest frequency the human ear can register," Bartlett guessed. "You hear it for an instant, then the ear gets tired and you don't hear it. Then after a moment's rest, the ear picks it up again."

"Perhaps so," the trooper said. His voice lifted. "Say, there's that fog now."

As if by magic the fog had suddenly appeared in the middle of a cleared field below them. One second it was not there, the next second it was. It lifted as high as the trees, a pearl-gray mushroom of mist. The time was about eleven o'clock in the morning. Bright sunlight flooded down from the warm spring sun. The fog reflected the sunlight.

"There's the whistle too," Bartlett said. A thin high sound was wavering just out of hearing. Bartlett stared. Awe was rising in him. He did not pretend to understand. "Whatever it is, that's no natural fog."

They watched.

From the fog came the sound of a woman's scream.

"Come on," Bartlett said. "Somebody is in trouble down there."

They found a path down the bluff,

splashed across the little river and the nearest riffle. Ahead of them the fog was visible. The woman screamed again. They climbed the bank of the river. Reaching the edge of the cleared field, they saw that the fog had vanished.

Out in the middle of the field stood—a woman. She was as near naked as any woman Bartlett had ever seen in public. And she was as angry as any woman he had ever seen either in public or in private. Or maybe she was just scared. At the sight of them she started running across the field toward them. Reaching them, she stopped abruptly. Drawing herself up to her full height, she spoke a single word.

"Men!"

If she had spat when she spoke, she could not have gotten more feeling into the word.

"What's wrong, madam? What happened?" The astonished trooper was prepared to ignore a dress that went beyond the bounds of public decency. She was a woman in distress. It was his job to help her.

"That's what I want to know—what happened? Where am I? Where did all those trees come from? What trickery is going on here?"

"Eh?" Gast said.

"I'll have somebody skinned alive for this. Where is this place? How was I transported here? Who dares to take such liberties with Neeta?" Her chin came up, her eyes flashed.

"What?" the startled trooper said.

"And while we're about it, what do you two men mean by standing in my presence? Down on your knees!"

The tone of her voice indicated that she really meant to say, "Down, dogs!"

A FAINT tinge of red began to appear on Gast's brown face.

"Easy, madam," the trooper said. He

glanced sideways at Bartlett, a look that plainly said he thought he had a nut on his hands and wanted some help in handling her.

"Where did you get those clothes?" the woman demanded. Before either could answer, her gaze had fastened itself on the gun holstered at Gast's hip. "And armed? Don't you know you can get your head taken off for being armed?"

"No, madam," the trooper said. Now more than ever he was convinced that he had a nut on his hands and he was preparing himself for the worst—a nutty woman. A nutty man you could slug. But all you could do to a woman was to try to reason with her, or, that failing, to try to restrain her. In the process, you inevitably got your shins kicked and your face clawed.

"Well, it's high time you learned it! Where did you get that weapon? Don't you know that it is against the law for men to own or possess weapons? Don't you—"

Bartlett spoke for the first time, two words.

"Shut up!"

He suspected that this woman, whoever she was, was hysterical from shock and fright. In this case, a slap or a stiff order might help to restore her mental balance, at least temporarily.

It didn't work this way with Neeta. For a moment her mouth hung open. She was really shocked now, if she hadn't been before. Slowly her face turned red. Righteous, burning anger sounded in the tones of her voice when she spoke.

"This insult from a man is more than flesh can bear. For this impertinence, I'll have you dismembered, I'll have you taken apart a joint at a time, starting with the fingers, then the knuckles, then the wrists."

In consternation Bartlett stared at her. She talked as if she not only meant what she said but could have the power to carry out her ideas. "I beg your pardon," he said swiftly. If harsh words would not quiet her, perhaps soft words would do the job. "There seems to be some misunderstanding, some mistake."

"And you have made it!"

"That may be." Bartlett was calm and patient. "However, I want to get at the truth of this matter. We saw a strange fog appear and heard someone scream. Coming to investigate, we found you. We assume you are the person who was screaming. Now the question is—Who are you? Where did you come from? And—what happened?"

As he spoke, the anger began to go out of her eyes. She seemed to realize for the first time that the situation was not only usual but was out of control. Fear replaced the anger. "Fog?" She repeated the word. Listening, Bartlett realized that while she used common English words, her pronunciation was different, so much different that he had trouble understanding her. Suddenly her whole manner changed.

"What country is this?" Fear crept into the tone of her voice.

"What?" the trooper gasped. If she didn't know what country they were in, obviously she was nuts. "Any idiot knows—"

"Please," Bartlett said quickly. "This is the United States of America."

"What?" She gasped the word. Anger began to gather again in her eyes. "Do you think you can fool me?"

"I am not trying to fool you." The tone of Bartlett's voice would have soothed a hysterical child. Would it soothe this woman? "This is the Unit-

ed States—believe me."

"That can't be!"

"Why can't it be?"

"Because—because that's the old name—" Doubt showed in her voice.

"What country do you think it is?"

"Why—Matriland!"

"Matriland?" Bartlett spoke.

"I never heard of such a country," Gast broke in. "This women has got a bunch of loose gears in her upper story."

"I'm not so certain of it," Bartlett said. Cold was walking through him. "It may be that we have run up against something here that is outside usual human experience. Where is Matriland?"

"Why—here!" She spread her hands. "Suddenly there was a fog around me. When it lifted, I was here. Please, what happened? If I am not in Matriland, where am I? Isn't this the continent of North America? Isn't this the planet Earth?"

"It is."

"Then—" Her eyes were wary and thoughtful. "What year is it?"

"1950."

"What?" she gasped.

"What year did you think it was?" Bartlett asked.

"That damned Helen!" she burst out. She at least seemed to have some comprehension of what had happened. For a moment she hesitated, doubtful and afraid. "I refuse to believe it. Even Helen could not have accomplished this. It is a trick, of some kind. Tell me: Have you never heard of Neeta, Matriarch of Missouri?"

"This gets curiouser and curiouser," Bartlett spoke. For an instant he felt a sympathy for Alice in Wonderland, knowing how she felt. "No, I never heard of Neeta—though this is the state of Missouri. Are you this Matriarch?"

Proudly she drew herself up.
"I am."

THE TROOPER laughed uneasily. Bartlett sighed. "Matriarch!" he repeated the word. There was a harshness in its very sound, a fringe meaning he did not like, an echo of an earlier page in the history of the human race, of the era when the mothers and the women had ruled; an echo also of the roll of battle, of an ancient, unceasing war that had smouldered down the pages of history like a fire that had never been quite quenched and had never burst into full flame. But always it had threatened to burst into a conflagration.

War, the grimmest, most deadly war that had ever been fought, the fight between the sexes for mastery. As a psychologist he knew that this war had smouldered in the bedrooms of American in 1950, it had flared across the breakfast table, and had seethed in the living room.

"Matriarch!" again he repeated the word. Momentarily he was inclined to agree with the trooper that this beautiful, proud, and imperious woman who called herself Neeta, Matriarch of Missouri, was actually suffering from a delusional fantasy, but in the back of his mind was the growing suspicion that more than delusion, more than fantasy, was involved here. He kept remembering that fog. He had seen it with his own eyes. He was not delusional.

Like a dog hearing a far-off whistle, the trooper turned his head and seemed to listen—for something.

Unconsciously Bartlett found himself listening too.

He heard a thin whistle. It came and went, now he heard it, now he didn't.

"Beat it!" the trooper suddenly

shouted, his voice suddenly shrill.

Too late! The fog was already forming around them. It seemed to close around them like jelly, a thick gelatin that held them tight. In that fog, cut off from sight, Bartlett heard Neeta scream again.

She sounded as if she was scared half to death.

He knew he was in no better emotional condition himself.

CHAPTER II

THERE WAS an incredible moment during which time seemed to do two different things at once, it seemed to stand still, and it seemed to rush past them with the speed of light. Bartlett had the sensation of incredible physical movement in space, a movement that took him past worlds in the sky. Or was he standing still and were the worlds moving past him? He did not know which was true and he had no time to bring his mind to bear on the problem. The effort to breathe was a physical torture, the fog flowed into and through his lungs, it seemed to penetrate every cell of his body, through muscle and bone, through blood and gland, and reach into the sub-atomic depths of the very molecules and atoms that made up his body, gripping and holding each molecule and each atom. For a timeless instant it held him. Then, gently, it let go.

He fell a few feet only but his feeling was that he was going to fall forever. His lungs cried out in response to the ancient, instinctive fear of the fall that has come down to all man from earlier days when a fall from a tree might mean death. Then the fall was checked abruptly. He lit on his feet but he let himself go limp in the instinctive movement of a good foot-

ball player who has been tackled so often that falling safely has become second nature.

Around him a yip sounded and a hearty burst of profanity, the first from Neeta, the second from the trooper. The fog dissolved, slid away like a ghost, was gone.

Bartlett took a deep breath. Around him was—a city. They were in what he took to be a park. Grass, ragged with weeds, shrubs in need of trimming, lagoons and pools, a dry waterfall, these things he saw with half his mind. The rest of his mind went out to the city. The contours of the ground had changed. The flood plain of the meandering little river was gone. The cliffs that had risen on one side were either eroded away or leveled by artificial means. Where the cliffs had been, the ground now rose in a gentle slope. The river was gone. The city sprawled over everything.

The buildings were not tall, the tallest not over ten stories, but they were massive. Bartlett got the impression that the architects had designed with the idea in mind of erecting a structure that would withstand at least in part the blast of an atom bomb. No atom bomb had ever exploded over this city. That much was obvious. But Bartlett got the impression that something else had happened to it, something perhaps more devastating, something which was not spectacular but which showed its effects in little things: broken window panes that had not been replaced, weeds growing in a park, a waterfall with no water running over it.

From where he sat, he could see the buildings of the city: stout, imposing structures that had been built to withstand an atom bomb, gaping at him from broken windows like a city with a thousand blind, lusterless eyes.

Some of the broken windows had been stuffed with rags, others had been covered with cardboard or paper, but if any effort had been made to repair most of them, the results were not visible.

"Going downhill fast," he thought. And wondered what had happened that had stopped progress and had turned back the clock to the point where essential repairs were no longer being made.

So far his mind went with the puzzle of the city. Abruptly it came back to the more personal puzzle of what had happened to him.

Intuitively he recognized the truth. Somehow they had passed through time. He had read stories of time travel and had enjoyed them and now it had happened to him. He did not know how it had happened or what purpose, if any, lay back of it, but he suspected that the strange fog had something to do with it. Not that the fog in itself had been the agent that had caused his passage through time, it was probably only a by-product of the process, just as steam was the visible by-product of the operation of a locomotive.

NEETA AND Gast were getting to their feet. On Neeta's face as she looked at the city was rapt, bewildered pleasure. The trooper looked bewildered.

"Home," Neeta whispered. "I'm back." She seemed pleased as if she had awakened and discovered that the nightmare she had been having was only a nightmare after all, a horrible dream that wasn't real.

"Maybe you're home but where the hell am I?" Gast barked. For him, the nightmare was just beginning.

If the nightmare started bad, it got worse fast. Figures moved in the park.

Neeta let out a yell. They came running, resolving into two women dressed in police uniforms. Grim looking little bronze and silver weapons hung in holsters at their hips and they carried whips. At the sight of Neeta, their eyes widened in surprise. Each dropped hastily to one knee.

"Yes, your imperial majesty," they spoke in one voice.

Neeta took a deep breath. She had just been through a most surprising experience and she was still suffering from psychic shock. But the shock did not interfere with the operation of her voice. She pointed an accusing finger at Bartlett and Gast.

"Arrest these two men."

The two policewomen turned startled faces. "Men?" One questioned, as if she did not believe what she had heard.

"I said men!" Neeta answered. "Arrest them."

At the words, Gast's hand started toward the gun holstered at his hip. The trooper was bewildered and confused. A few seconds earlier he had been a lawman. Now he was being arrested. Bartlett grabbed his arm.

"Easy, Ed. Those things on their hips are not ornaments." The trooper surrendered his gun.

"Charge them with being armed," Neeta spoke. "Bring them into my presence tomorrow at the regular hour and I will sentence them."

"Yes, your majesty. Turn around, you two. March." Emphasizing the command, a whip cracked in the air. A split second later, it was cracking on their backs instead of in the air.

"That's just a taste of what you've got coming!" The voice of the police-woman came from behind them. It was the blonde speaking. The other, a brunette, was silent.

Ed Gast writhed at the lash of the whip. "I could knock that blonde

loose from her jaw," he whispered.

"Better not try it," Bartlett cautioned. "I've got a feeling they would enjoy shooting us."

They were marched out of the park and into the streets of the city. Here, for the first time, they saw the inhabitants. Women were moving along the streets, going into and emerging from the buildings. A few cars of an odd design moved along, driven by women. In spots the pavement was broken. A gang of women were lackadaisically repairing it. They worked as if they had no large interest in the matter, stopping to stare at the two men being marched down the street.

"Where are the men?" Gast muttered.

"Maybe they don't exist," Bartlett answered. "From the way these bim-bos stare at us, I would guess that most of them have never seen a man before."

"You mean we're the only men in a world of women?" the trooper spoke.

"It looks that way."

For a moment the trooper's face lighted as if there was something attractive about being the only men in a world of women, then he shook his head. "No, that can't be right. A world with no men in it couldn't exist."

"This one does exist," Bartlett pointed out.

"So it does. But where....and how...."

"My guess is that we've passed through time and into the world of the future and it turns out that the world of the future is a matriarchy."

"A matri—which?"

"A world of, by, and for women," the psychologist answered, bitterness creeping into his voice. "There is no question that matriarchies once existed on earth. That was long before the dawn of civilization. Those ancient primitive tribes were ruled by women,

descent was traced from the mother instead of the father, and women occupied the most important positions. Only with the invention of warfare and the tools of war did men become the dominant sex. Here in the future it looks as if the race has completed its cycle and has gone back to the ancient matriarchial way of life."

IT SEEMED impossible for a world of women to exist, he knew, but here it was before his eyes. How did they propagate the race without men? What had happened to the men? Had they all been killed, destroyed, wiped off the face of the earth? Were a few men held as captives, for breeding purposes? How had the women managed to become again the dominant sex, how had they seized the reins of power, how had they either eliminated men entirely or driven them out of their cities? How had the weaker sex—So far Bartlett got but no farther. In cold truth, women were not the weaker sex. That was man's idea about them, an idea that they had carefully fostered. Intelligence tests had revealed no essential difference between the two sexes in mental ability. Physically, men were often stronger, but Bartlett knew he could name from his own acquaintances a dozen women who were a match for any man in a rough and tumble brawl, knew also that the vaunted physical superiority of the male was more fiction than fact. Women liked to pretend that men were stronger than they—thus they could get men to do the harder work. They liked to pretend that men were intellectually stronger than they—thus they could get men to do their thinking for them.

Somehow or other they had shaken off the need for pretence and had emerged in this world of the future as what they always wanted to be—the

boss, the big shot, the master of the household. If there was such a thing as race memory, it seemed that no mother's daughter had ever really forgotten the delightful days of the ancient matriarchies when they had ruled the roost.

Now, in this future world, they were again the rulers.

"Turn right," the blonde yelled. Her whip cracked through the air. Ed Gast and George Bartlett turned right. They ended up in what had obviously been designed as a prison cell in some long-gone era of the past. And served that purpose still.

The desk sergeant who booked them was a woman.

The turnkey who took them to their cell, and turned the lock behind them with every evidence of relish as if she personally enjoyed locking them up, was also a woman.

But the person who looked up at them from across the littered, unclean cell, and rose quickly to his feet, a cry of gladness on his lips, was a man.

"Bud!" Bartlett gasped.

A SPLIT second later, they were pounding each other on the back and calling each other harsh names. Bud Bartlett was a younger, slighter edition of his famous brother, not so rugged but more handsome. "How did you get here?" he demanded.

"The same way you did, I guess. Through that fog."

"Yeah. And as soon as it let go, a couple of female cops grabbed me. George, what the hell is wrong with this world? They arrest you just because you're a man. Is that a crime, or something?"

"It may be a crime here," George Bartlett answered. He swiftly told what had happened to him and to Gast and gave his surmise as to where they were.

"I've already guessed I was in the future," Bud spoke. "But how far?"

"I'd have to guess on that. My hunch is not too far, something in the neighborhood of five hundred years, maybe less. The language hasn't changed much. We can understand these people and they can understand us. If we were thousands of years in the future the language would probably have changed so much we couldn't understand it. Remember how hard it was to understand Chaucer's English."

"You mean this matriarchy came into existence within five hundred years of 1950?"

"Maybe sooner than that," Bartlett answered. "When I stop to think, we could have seen the signs of its coming all around us in 1950, if we hadn't been blind. That was the beginning. Women senators, women lawyers, women doctors, women in every profession and in every job from the factory to the farm. They claimed that all they wanted was equality, which was a lot of hot air. What they really wanted was to be the bosses. Somehow or other they got the job done. Now they rule the world."

"I'm not so sure they rule it quite as completely as they would like," Bud Bartlett observed. "I've had the impression that they were scared of something."

"Scared of what?" Gast demanded. "That blonde with the whip acted like she would tackle a grizzly bare-handed, and give the bear first bite." He twisted his back where the effects of the whip lash still lingered, glowered out through the bars. "I'd like to get that baby alone on a desert island for a week or two. I'd teach her not to be so free with that whip she carries."

"It would probably do her good," Bartlett answered, laughing. "If she didn't die of the shock. But—what

happened to the men in this world?"

"What happened to the moon rockets we were all expecting back in 1950?" Bud spoke. "What happened to the atomic power development, what happened to all the wonderful inventions we were expecting in the future? Didn't they come off?"

"What happened to love?" Gast added. "Plain, old-fashioned love, what happened to it? Although I admit that blonde acted as if she wouldn't know what the word meant."

"You're getting a complex about that blonde," Bartlett said.

"If I can get her cornered, I'll complex her," Gast grunted. "When I get through with her, she won't know whether her complex is on or off."

"Shut up in there!" the turnkey yelled. "You're making too much noise."

"Come in and shut me up, sister," Gast snarled.

THERE WAS a clang in the corridor and the sound of running feet. Pulling the weapon from the holster at her hip, the turnkey glowered through the bars at Gast. "Go on, shoot me," the trooper jeered. "That's exactly what I would expect from a mud-faced slut like you—yeow!" The last was a scream of pain as the enraged turnkey leveled her weapon and pressed the trigger. A spray of intense purple light shot from it.

"It ain't turned on full force so all it will do will be to singe you," the turnkey yelled. "How do you like that, loud-mouth?"

Screaming, Gast backed away.

"Turn it off," Bartlett spoke. "He was out of his mind, he didn't know what he was saying."

"Shut your big mouth," the turnkey said. "Or I'll shut it for you." Turning away from Gast, she flicked the beam over Bartlett. A flash of pain,

the sensation of being struck by a thousand stinging nettles, seared through him.

"How do-you like that?" the turnkey jeered. "You'll get some more of it, with more power, if I have any more trouble out of you." She walked away, laughing.

Gast stripped off his shirt and gingerly examined the red streak across his chest. "Damned bitch," he muttered. "She's next on my list." This time he took care not to be overheard.

Bud whistled. "They sure play rough around here."

"They're just doing what the average woman always wanted to do but didn't quite dare," Bartlett spoke.

"But—" The youth's face clouded. "I always thought of women as sweet and nice and kind and generous—"

"The romantic ideal of women!" Bartlett spoke. "Men invented that ideal. Because they found it useful, women encouraging men to believe that was what they were. A few women probably fooled themselves and actually lived up to that ideal but most of them really wanted to do just what this turnkey did—burn the pants off of every man who talked back to them."

"You don't make them out to be the lovely creatures everybody thought they were."

"I make them out to be what they were, not what somebody *thought* they were." Bitterness crept into his voice. "Maybe it was our fault, maybe we should not have put them up on a pedestal and tried to worship them. Maybe that's where we went wrong. We went wrong somewhere, that's for sure." His gaze went through the grill following the direction in which the turnkey had vanished. Involuntarily he drew back.

The turnkey had reappeared. Following her was—another woman. But

unlike most of the women they had seen so far, this one looked as if she had stepped straight out of the pages of an art magazine. She was pure calendar art.

For a few moments she studied the occupants of the cell.

"I'll take him first," she said, pointing to George Bartlett.

"Come out of there, mug," the turnkey yelled. "You're being sent for."

CHAPTER III

MISS CALENDER ART led the way to a small room which contained a desk and two chairs. "I am Helen Five," she said. "And you?"

Bartlett told her his name. She repeated it as if she could not quite accustom her tongue to the way it sounded. "I would like to ask some questions. Won't you sit down, please."

She questioned him carefully and at great length, showing great interest in the strange fog that had been a part of the time transit. He answered truthfully. He could not tell what purpose lay back of her questions but he got the impression she was worried about something. He knew she was watching him closely and she seemed to be trying to make up her mind about him. "Are there any questions you want to ask me?" Helen Five said at last.

"At least a million," Bartlett answered. "First, the year?"

"2370."

"Four hundred and twenty years after my time this matriarchy is in existence. Would you mind—" he hesitated, wondering if he dared ask the question. "—telling me how you girls managed to get the upper hand over the men?"

She had some difficulty in understanding what he wanted to know. "The upper hand? Oh, I see. How did we achieve our rightful position of

dominance? It's all in the old books—"

"But I haven't read the books. I would appreciate it if you would tell me." Bartlett was deliberately flattering. His tone and manner said that anything she told him would be important. He could see that she liked it. On so thin and precarious a foothold as her liking him or not liking him he was probably basing his hope of continued existence.

"First—" Her forehead wrinkled as she tried to recall the steps. "It is hard to know what was the first step. It was taken so long ago. Perhaps the first step was the right to vote. Did women vote in your time? They did. Then we had already taken the step that led to eventual control."

"But that wasn't all of it."

"Not at all. The second step was the campaign for equality."

"But that still wasn't all of it."

"Oh, no. Women were still under the obligation of bearing children. It was only when this obligation was finally removed that they achieved their rightful position."

"Eh?" Bartlett was startled. "Women today don't bear children?"

"Of course not." Helen Five seemed surprised at the question. "It was the discovery of the process of developing fertilized ova in nutrient solutions that relieved women of that onerous burden."

"Incubator babies?"

"Yes. The discovery was made in 2065. It is the date of the final emancipation of women."

"I can see how incubator babies would relieve women of the necessity of child bearing but I still can't see how—"

"They could achieve control just because of that fact? They couldn't, of course, without the additional fact that this same process also gave control of the sex of the offspring. In

other words, incubator babies could be either boys or girls, just as was desired."

"But—"

"Gradually the proportion of girl children was increased and the proportion of boys was decreased. Within a generation there were more women than men. Of course, the fact that more girls than boys were being produced was carefully kept secret. Gradually, a few at a time, men were voted out of political office. The time came when every legislator in the United States, the president, the congress, and all the members of the state legislatures down to the city and county offices, were women."

FIRE FLASHED in the eyes of Helen Five. Her fist came down on the desk. "Then women were able to make the laws to suit themselves. And we made them, too—"

"I'll bet you did," Bartlett said. At the look on her face, he hastily changed the tone of his voice. "I imagine the laws were very wise and made complete provision for the welfare of every individual. But what happened to the men?"

"They revolted, of course. But that had been anticipated. The revolt was put down."

"With bloodshed?"

Something like a shiver passed across Helen Five's sensitive face. "The books say there was bitter war which lasted for years. When it ended the women held the cities. The men who remained alive were bandits, outlaws, hiding for their lives." She spoke reluctantly, with pain in her voice.

"And that's the way it is now?"

Bartlett questioned.

"Yes. The national government that once existed has collapsed. Even the state governments are gone. All that remain are the cities—and the forests."

"Men still live in the forests?"

"Yes."

"How do they perpetuate themselves, without women?"

"At first, they stole women from the cities. They still do, for breeding purposes. Small skulking bands roam the countryside. Agriculture, mining, industry are all gone. I don't know what life is like in the other continents, we have lost contact with them."

"In other words, you won the right to be boss, but you no longer have anybody to boss?"

"Y—yes." Was he mistaken or was there something close to tears hidden in the corners of her eyes? She tossed her head. "But that doesn't mean—"

"How do the women like it?"

"How do they—? Why, fine."

"How do *you* like it?"

"How do—?"

"Yes, you!"

Her voice sank to a whisper. "I think it is the most horrible thing that ever happened. I think, unless some way is found to stop it, it means the doom of the human race." Now for the first time the tears were clearly visible on her face.

Bartlett stared at her, amazed. Up until this moment, his picture of the matriarchy of the future had been grim indeed. Agriculture, industry, mining and probably science too, all gone. The world not only headed straight back toward barbarism but already there. Humanity going the way of the dodo bird and the dinosaur, all because the two sexes had been unable to decide which was the boss. But if the matriarchy had brought this about, it had also produced at least one honest woman who was not only capable of facing facts but of putting them together in the proper order—Helen Five. He reached forward across the desk and patted her hand. She looked surprised, and

pleased, as if something important had happened to her.

"That's the first time a man ever touched me," she said. "I had always thought it would be horrible. But it wasn't—" She broke off.

THE DOOR had opened. The turnkey stood there. The expression on her face was not pleasant. "I heard what you said," she said to Helen Five. "You're a traitor to your own sex. You can have your head chopped off for even thinking what you just said."

All color drained from Helen Five's face. She got slowly to her feet. "But—"

"I heard it. There ain't no use in you trying to lie out of it." The turnkey had the deadly ray gun in her hand. "I'm going to march you straight to Neeta. The Matriarch knows how to deal with sluts like you."

Her face the color of milk, Helen Five moved slowly from the room.

"Just a minute." Bartlett got quickly to his feet.

"What do you want, man?" the turnkey demanded.

Bartlett had never hit a woman in his life. He hit one now, right on the point of her out-thrust jaw. Every ounce of muscle-energy he possessed went into that blow.

"Uh!" the turnkey said. Her teeth popped together like a snapping trap, her eyes popped open, and she went backward into the corner of the room. She hit the wall, slid to the floor, and did not move.

"What did you hit her with?" Helen Five gasped.

"My fist," Bartlett answered, rubbing his knuckles. To Helen Five a fist was a new weapon. She stared at it as if she did not believe that such a simple weapon was capable of causing so much damage. "But you have

just gotten yourself into desperate trouble. When she revives, she'll report what happened."

Bartlett bent down, picked up the gun. "When she arrives, I don't intend to be around," he answered.

"But what are you going to do?"

"First, I'm going to get my friends. Then we're going to head for the forest."

"The forest?"

"Yes."

"But—but the men are there."

"I know—that's what you said. That's why I'm going there. I've seen enough of this matriarchy to last me the rest of my natural life."

"But—the men!" Something about the idea frightened her. "But if they catch you—"

"I'm a man, remember?"

"I mean, if they catch me—" Her face colored.

"Oh. You intend to go along with us?"

"I've got to go along. She will report me as soon as she recovers. She wasn't just talking when she said I was a traitor. The Matriarch will have my head off my shoulders. She already suspects me."

"Then you will have to go with us. The question is— How can we get away from here?" He mused, considering the problem. On the floor, the turnkey moaned.

"I can say I am taking you to the Matriarch," Helen Five said. "Then, when we're outside, we can just keep moving. It will be dark within an hour. I'll hide you until then. I'll collect food and weapons. After dark, we'll slip out of the city."

"You are willing to take this risk for the sake of three men?"

"I'm taking it for my own sake first of all." Helen Five bent and removed the chain of keys from the turnkey's belt. Bartlett slipped the gun under

his coat. They needed but a minute to release Gast and Bud from the cell.

IN THE lobby the desk sergeant looked up at them.

"I'm taking these men to the Matriarch," Helen Five said crisply.

"Okay. Sign for 'em here."

She signed the register. "Want a guard?" the sergeant questioned.

"For just three men? Phf!" Helen Five answered.

"You're right, dearie," the sergeant said. She eyed them. "They don't look like such fancy specimens to me either."

"Why, you—" Gast started to say.

"Shut up!" Bartlett hissed. Muttering beneath his breath, the trooper subsided. Helen Five picked up a holster and a whip from the sergeant's desk. Apparently she had checked them upon entering and was now retrieving them. They walked out of the building with her following close behind them. Her whip cracked in the air.

"How far can we trust that dame?" the trooper muttered, flinching.

Bartlett was silent. Following Helen Five's directions, they ended up in an apartment in one of the massive buildings, walking up six flights of stairs to reach it. There were elevators but they were not running. "The power failed last year," Helen Five explained. "The technicians have not been able to get the generators working again." The tone of her voice said that she never really expected the technicians to provide current.

"Sounds like a little incompetence somewhere," Bartlett ventured.

"A little? It sounds like a lot to me," Helen Five answered. She unlocked the door and let them in. Revealed was a five room apartment, clean and neat and well furnished. She snapped a switch and soft lights came. "I have installed my own private pow-

or unit," she explained.

"You can do what the technicians can't do," Bartlett said.

She did not answer the implied question. "You will be safe here, I think. I will return as soon as possible. We will plan to leave about midnight." She closed the door. The latch clicked softly.

"A born boss, if I ever saw one," Ed Gast muttered. "Every damned woman I've seen here has had the idea that she's boss. If they feel that way, how do they ever get anything done?"

"They don't," Bartlett answered. "The city is falling to pieces around them and they don't do anything about it because every one of them wants to boss the job."

The latch clicked and Helen Five entered. "I forgot to tell you not to try to escape without me; you would never get through the barrier."

"What is the barrier?"

"It's an electronic web that surrounds the city. This gun is an adaptation of it." She touched the weapon holstered at her hip. "We use it to protect the city from the men outside." Again she was gone.

"They seem scared to death of men," Bud Bartlett spoke.

"She is scared of more than men," his brother added. "I don't like this situation a little bit." He moved to the door, opened it. Across the hall another door was open.

A man was looking out of it.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN had a two weeks' growth of beard on his face. His clothes were unpressed and dirty and they gave the impression that he had slept in them. But even if it did need pressing badly, the suit had an unmistakably familiar appearance. Bartlett took

one look at that suit and knew where this man had come from. He moved forward, hand outstretched.

"Who the hell are you? How'd you get here? Are you working with her?" Questions burst from the man's lips. He took Bartlett's hand. "I'm Ted Nolan. I am or I was—"

"A salesman," Bartlett said.

"How'd you know that?"

"A salesman was missing. I guessed you were he."

Nolan was sandy-haired and hollow-cheeked. There was a gauntness about his body and his clothes hung loosely upon him. Behind him in the door another figure moved, a youth with a thin growth of whiskers on his face. Bartlett knew instantly that here was both the salesman and the farm boy who were missing back in 1950.

"Helen Five has been hiding us ever since we hit this place," Nolan explained. "She was waiting for both of us. As soon as the fog lifted, she got us out of sight and brought us here. Not only that, but I'm almost positive that she's the one who worked this time shift."

"So am I," Bartlett answered.

"You mean you've known all along that she's the one who brought us here?" Ed Gast spoke.

"I haven't known it, just suspected it," Bartlett answered. "She turned up too soon to question us. It was also obvious that she knew far more than she was telling. The question is—what is she trying to do?"

"She's trying to make herself boss of this city, for one thing," Nolan spoke.

"How is she going to do that?"

The salesman shrugged. "I'm damned if I know. She talked to us a lot but she didn't tell us any of her plans. She didn't actually say she was trying to be boss but I got the impression from a lot of little things she

said at different times."

"But why did she need us?"

Again Nolan shrugged. "That gal is an expert at keeping her mouth shut."

"How did she work that time transit?"

"She didn't say," Nolan answered. "But there's a lot of equipment up on the top floor of this building. She spends most of her time up there, working with several other women who are apparently in cahoots with her. I'm not sure but I think she's got a time machine up there. Only it's not a machine, of course. It's—" Nolan's voice trailed off as he struggled for words to express the time transit. "I think of it as a machine because I read one of the Wells stories about a time machine. But this isn't that. It stays put. It doesn't move. I mean—" He gave up the effort.

"We haven't yet invented the words to describe the time transit or the machinery that makes it possible," Bartlett said. "That isn't important. The important thing—" He looked upward toward the ceiling.

"I get it," Gast said. "If the machinery that brought us through time is up there— There are five of us. Why don't we just go up and use it to send ourselves back through time?"

NOLAN laughed. "I've got a hunch we won't find it too easy to get up there. The place is guarded." He broke off. From the direction of the stairways came the sound of running feet and of labored breathing.

"What the hell's that?" Gast spoke. His hand went to his hip, feeling automatically for the weapon that was not there. Helen Five came stumbling up the stairway. Her blouse had been almost torn from her body and a livid bruise was visible on her forehead. The setting sun, slanting in through the windows, illumined her as she stumbled

toward them. Bartlett moved forward, caught her arm. She glanced from him to Nolan.

"I see you have discovered each other. Well, it doesn't matter now. We've got to get out of here, fast. Neeta has discovered that I have been the leader of the plot against her."

"What plot?"

"To overthrow her and bring back the old times," Helen Five gasped. "The turnkey recovered too quickly. She got to the Matriarch before I did. Neeta's personal guards are on the way here now. Help me to the top floor, quickly." Bartlett didn't ask why. She was so near exhaustion that he had to almost carry her up the stairs. A locked door stopped them. Helen Five rapped on it with the butt of the ray-gun, a series of raps that apparently formed a code. The door opened. A woman looked out. She saw Bartlett and started to draw back. "He's with me," Helen Five spoke quickly. "Everybody out right now. Put plan two in operation. Move." No drill sergeant ever got more snap into his voice than did Helen Five at this moment.

The woman's face whitened, but she nodded. At her call, footsteps sounded in the big rooms beyond. Bartlett caught a glimpse of what those rooms contained, heavy electrical equipment of some kind. He only got a glimpse before his view was obstructed by running women. Buckling on weapons, they moved with the precision of a drill team out the door and down the steps.

"We've gotten ready for this," Helen Five whispered. "We know exactly what we are going to do. Even if we are traitors to our own sex, we have no choice." Her face was chalk white, her voice unsteady, in her throat a vein was throbbing.

Bartlett nodded as if he understood

exactly what she was talking about. In point of fact, he understood nothing. He felt a little like a straw caught in a river in flood and being whirled madly along with the torrent. When the last woman was out, Helen Five stepped inside. On the wall was a switch covered with red paint. She reached twice for it before her finger could find the button. The third time she made it. A thud, as of a heavy relay being shoved home, sounded somewhere in the rooms beyond.

Helen Five quickly closed the door, glanced at the watch on her wrist. "We've got ten minutes to clear the building."

"And if we don't."

"We'll be in a mighty bad spot. The explosives in there will blow the whole roof off the building."

He caught her, swung her around. "But the time transit machinery is in there?"

"How did you know about that?"

"Guessed it. It's true, isn't it?"

"You're guessing too well. Yes, it's true."

"But if you blow that up, we're marooned here!"

Her face was white, her voice taut. "Yes. We need men from your time here, need them desperately."

"Why? I thought you women had proved you didn't need men. What's gone wrong?"

"Everything has gone wrong with it. You've seen this city. It's falling to pieces. That's only one thing that's wrong. A few of us have realized this and have tried to do something about it."

"But if you've got to have men, what's wrong with the men of your own time? All you have to do is to let down this barrier you told us about. You'll soon have plenty of men."

"You're so good at guessing, you should have guessed what's wrong with

them. They're wild beasts of the jungle, they're cannibals!"

"What? Wild beasts, perhaps. Wild I do not doubt. But Cannibals— How the hell do you know?"

"Everybody knows it. I wanted men from the past, tame men. When we discovered the time transit device, I saw a chance to get them. I was going to bring thousands of them here, if I could."

"Tame men! You wanted tame men!" He shouted the words at her.

"Of course. What's wrong with that?"

"I'll tell you later what's wrong with it. Get in there and shut off the current from those explosives."

"I can't. The door is steel. Also an attempt to bring it down sets up a secondary circuit that explodes the charges instantly. We planned it that way."

"You and your damned plans. You're like all the rest of the women, you want tame men so you can boss them. Come on. If this place is going to blow up, let's get to hell out."

THEY WENT down the stairs on the run. The men were waiting, and wondering what was going on. They had seen the procession of women racing down the stairs. "Come on," Bartlett yelled. As they raced down the last flight of stairs, the hiss of ray guns became audible ahead of them. A woman screamed, then another. At the foot of the stairs a battle was in progress.

"Neeta's guards!" Helen Five gasped.

In the lobby two women in uniform sprawled on the floor. A third was trying to crawl away. One of the women with Helen Five was down, gasping. The acrid odor of seared flesh was a growing stench in the air.

"Holy hell, these women fight like

cats!" Bud cried.

"They fight like women," Bartlett said. One of the women with Helen Five leveled a ray gun at the guard trying to crawl toward the door. Bartlett jerked the weapon upward and out of her grasp. "What kind of an animal are you?" He was outraged.

The woman was equally outraged. "That guard would do the same to me if the positions were reversed. Give me that gun before she gets away."

"I'll give you a poke in the jaw," Bartlett answered. He held the gun away while the guard crawled out the door, then tossed it back to the woman. For an instant he thought she was going to use it on him but Helen Five spoke sharply. "Lillian, stop it instantly."

Outside a command rang out. The lobby was clear but through the doors and windows they could see guards running to take up positions around the building, blocking all exits.

"Down to the basement," Helen Five spoke. "We'll escape through the old sewers." She was unperturbed by the fact that the building was surrounded.

"I suppose you planned this too?" Bartlett spoke.

"As a matter of fact, we did," Helen Five answered. "Do you object?"

"Not this time," Bartlett answered. He was angry with her and with this whole world of the future. The human race, which might have risen to endless heights, had fouled itself up with a senseless war between the sexes. They went swiftly down the steps into the dark basement. One of the women opened a door. Below was the odor of mustiness and decay.

"Do we have to go down into that place?" Nolan complained.

"You can stay here and play hop-tag with those lovely creatures up

stairs, if you want," Ed Gast answered. The salesman shook his head violently. "I'll take the sewer," he said.

The door closed behind them. From some hiding place in the wall the woman produced flash lights. Revealed was a dark tunnel of concrete with a trickle of water running down the middle. "I suppose the sewer system is out of order too and that this tunnel hasn't been used in years," Bartlett spoke.

"That's right," Helen Five answered. She didn't attempt to defend her world.

Somewhere far above them sounded a dull roar. A shock passed through the ground. The walls of the sewer grumbled. Here and there chunks of concrete, already loosened by the attrition of years, broke loose from the reinforcing steel and tumbled down, sending up showers of gray dust.

"There went the roof," Helen Five spoke. "While Neeta's guards are trying to convince her that we died up there, we ought to have time to escape."

"What are your plans now?" Bartlett questioned.

"We're going to seize the power station. Then we'll try to bargain with Neeta."

"What good will the power station do you?"

"It controls the electronic web that protects the city. It also provides the current that operates these weapons. They operate from radio broadcast power, as you have guessed. If we control the power station, Neeta will have to bargain with us. Otherwise we will threaten to turn off the power."

"Then what will happen?"

"Why, the ray guns won't work. Also—" She was quickly silent.

"I hadn't guessed the ray guns operate by broadcast power," Bartlett said. "What else won't work?"

Helen Five didn't answer.

WHEN THEY emerged from the sewer, they found themselves in a darkened city. Like almost everything else, the street lighting system was out of order. Off in the distance fingers of flame were reaching into the sky, ignited by the explosion the top floor of the building they had quitted was burning.

"I hope Neeta gets herself thoroughly scorched," Helen Five said.

"What kind of a bargain are you going to try to make with her, if you can seize the power station?" Bartlett questioned.

"The privilege of bringing more men out of time, enough to start a new race here," Helen Five answered. "With them, we will go somewhere else—and found a new city. In that way we hope to give the race a new start."

"Um," Bartlett said.

"What do you think?"

"Part of the time I think you are a wonderful woman. The rest of the time I think the thing you need most is a swift kick in the pants. I still say you've got to make your peace with the men of your own time, not with men from the past."

"But—"

"Oh, shut up! Get busy on this power station you are going to take."

In the darkness, he could hear Helen Five literally gnash her teeth at him. But she got busy. To give her credit, she was efficient. The attack on the power station had apparently been long-planned. Women, adherents of Helen Five, appeared out of the darkness. The explosion of the rooftop laboratory had been a signal sum-

moning them, the exit from the sewer had been the prearranged rallying spot. When about twenty had arrived, they marched away through the dark city. Search was in progress for them, policewomen were in sight on the main streets, but by keeping to the alleys they arrived at the power station.

It was a hunched, squat building. And it was lighted. A screen of vaguely purple light, similar to the radiations from the ray guns, circled it. Inside the circle of light, alert guards were visible.

"That's the special barrier that protects the power station," Helen Five explained. "It is similar to the one that protects the city, except it's smaller."

Off in the darkness at the outer edge of the city another vague purple glow lifted into the air.

"What happens if you stumble into that glow accidentally?" Gast questioned.

Helen Five shivered and did not answer.

"How are you going to get through it?" Bartlett asked.

"We're not going through it, we're going under it," Helen answered.

CHAPTER V

UNDER the web barrier, in this case, meant the sewer again. In the middle of another dark, stinking tunnel, Helen Five stopped.

"You men will remain here."

"Remain here?"

"Yes. If we are successful in the attack, we will come after you. If we are unsuccessful, my advice is for you to continue down this sewer. It will take you under the main barrier that protects the city. Outside somewhere you will find bands of roaming men that you can probably join." Her

voice was crisp. Plans had been carefully made. All that remained was to attempt to carry them out. The tone of her voice said that she expected no resistance to her plans.

She got resistance. Got it fast. "Let me get this straight," Bartlett said. "You expect us to remain here while you and your pals go up and tackle the guards in the power station. Is that correct?"

"That's right."

"Nuts."

Helen Five recoiled. Nobody had ever said "Nuts" to her before. She didn't quite know how to act. "But—"

"I said 'Nuts', sister, and I meant it. You're not going up there and fight while we huddle like rats down here in the sewer. Is that's right, boys?"

A growl answered him. "All I hope is that that blonde is on duty up there," Gast spoke.

"But—"

"Find some of these ray guns for us."

"But we don't have any more weapons available. Anyhow—"

"Then we'll use clubs, rocks, and our bare fists." Bartlett tossed the weapon he carried to Mike Westerville, the farm youth. "Here. You're the youngest. You use this. The rest of us will use our fists."

"But you don't understand," Helen Five wailed. "You men are very important to us. You're the only tame men we have. Now, with the time transit machinery destroyed, we may never be able to obtain others. We've simply got to protect you."

Bartlett's snort of disgust echoed through the tunnel. "What you don't seem to understand is this: *There never was a tame man in all history.* The very best that culture was able to achieve was to lay a thin veneer of

civilization over him, but as for taming him, it simply was never done."

"But there simply *must* have been tame men at some time in the past. Otherwise how could women have ever lived with them?" A touch of panic was in her voice.

"Women lived with them by accepting them for what they were—half-tamed wild animals. Which was just exactly what the women were too. The trouble with you is that you are thinking exactly like all the rest of the women in this world, that you have to be boss. That's why you want tame men, *because you couldn't boss any other kind and you know it.* You might as well get this fact into your head, sister, before you get it knocked there: There are no tame men in the world, there never were, there never will be."

A grunt of assent went up from the men. The women were silent, startled, maybe scared, Bartlett thought. Quite suddenly they were realizing they were alone here in the dark place with five men. Wild men. Or wild under the surface, though partly tame on top. They conferred in whispers.

"You think, now that they know the truth about us, that they may try to bump us off?" Gast whispered.

"There'll be a lot of hell popping here in this tunnel if they do!" Bartlett answered grimly. He flexed the fingers of his right hand, automatically they formed into a fist. The women reached a decision.

"Very well," Helen Five spoke. "We will take you with us. I only hope you know how to fight."

"Sister, some day you are going to get in one dig too many," Bartlett answered.

"Don't call me 'sister!'" she snapped. "I'm not your sister."

Bartlett grinned. "Now that you have mentioned it, you're not. And that's fine." He grinned again, boldly, at her. To his surprise, she seemed pleased. Or at least she didn't seem any angrier. He wondered how this proud, imperious, haughty, beautiful female would react if grabbed in the dark and thoroughly, effectively, and triumphantly kissed. Was there any passion left in these women of the future? "It would be interesting to find out," he muttered.

"To find out what?" Helen Five asked.

"Nothing," he answered hastily.

THEY MOVED forward. In a sub-basement they made a discovery. Behind thick lead walls some type of generator was functioning. There was an automatic switchboard with heavy cables rising to the ceiling. Bartlett took one look and turned to his brother. "You wondered what had happened to atomic power in this world. There's one thing that happened to it. There's an atomic generator behind those shields. It's being used to generate current to power an electronic barrier—and the weapons these females shoot each other with."

Bud was silent. "We had high hopes for atomic power." He seemed sad.

"We also had high fears about it," Bartlett answered. "One of our fears came true."

"We will strike first for the control room," Helen Five whispered.

The attack was launched like an arrow from the bow. To give them credence, these women knew how to plan and to execute a military attack, which was exactly what this was. The control room was in the heart of the structure, a kind of sub-fortress within the fort itself. Two women were on guard outside the door. The attack

was launched from a doorway leading upward from the basement. The two guards were beamed down mercilessly. Three women, headed by Lillian, drove into the control room itself. Here operators were on duty.

The operators died almost without knowing what hit them. Within a minute after the time when the attack was launched from the top of the stairway, the control room was taken.

"We've won," Helen Five exulted. It was the first sound that had been spoken. The women with her were already slipping into the jobs of the operators.

"You girls seem to know just exactly what to do," Bartlett said. He was a little dazed, both by the suddenness of the attack and by the swiftness with which it had been pressed home.

"I have worked on the equipment here many times, I know every inch of this place," Helen answered. She pointed to a small switchboard. "This board controls the flow of energy to the ray weapons. This one controls the electronic barrier outside. The larger board controls the electronic barrier around the city. This is the heart of the defensive and offensive devices of the city. And we control it! Tomorrow I will be Matriarch."

"What will happen to Neeta?"

"She will be exiled outside the main barrier of the city, never to return."

"What if she objects?"

"She will have no choice. We control the flow of energy to the weapons of her guards. She isn't loved. Without protection, she will either flee the city or be destroyed by her own people."

"You don't give her much choice," Bartlett answered. "Incidentally, how did it happen that you sent her through time? She was back in our

time for a few minutes, just before the fog closed over us?"

"It was an accident," Helen Five answered. "She was near the lab and our time transit projector was focused on her without our knowledge of it."

"Why didn't you just leave her back there in our time?"

"We would, if we had known she was there," Helen Five answered.

A SHOUT sounded outside. Through the door of the control room a ray beam hissed. Purple light seemed to explode in the air. One of the women went down, never to move again.

"It's a counterattack!" Gast shouted.

"But they can't attack us," Helen Five wailed. "Don't they know that anybody who controls this equipment also controls the city?"

"Maybe nobody ever told 'em that?" Bartlett answered. "You better get your gals busy with their squirt guns."

The doors of the control room were slammed shut, the defenders took up positions beside firing ports inside. Through vision slits they could see what was happening outside.

"They've doubled the guards!" Helen Five whispered. "They have three times as many people as we have."

"That was a dirty trick," Bartlett spoke, with no sympathy in his voice.

"But they'll kill us all. They've got us outnumbered three to one."

"That's the chance you take when you start a fight. But—why don't you cut off the power to their weapons?"

"That would also cut off the power to our weapons. We couldn't defend ourselves."

"And you couldn't be attacked,

either. In that case, you might work out a compromise."

A ray gun barrel thrust through a firing port from the outside and sweeping the room accented the need for something. Both men and women went to the floor, dodging the deadly flare of purple violence. Bartlett slid across the floor to the control panel, pulled the master switch on the smaller board.

Instantly the ray beam went off.

There was consternation inside the control room. Outside was additional consternation as the attackers discovered their weapons would not work. Bartlett rose to his feet, opened the heavy door. Outside a startled woman looked up at him. It was the same blonde policewoman who had arrested him and Gast. She was examining the weapon she held.

"It doesn't work, huh, hot stuff?" Bartlett said.

"No, it doesn't. Where did you come from?"

"No matter? Why don't you girls call off this fracas?"

"Call it off?" The blonde seemed startled. Her eyes narrowed and she regarded Bartlett thoughtfully, "Say, that's an idea! Hey, girls, here's a man who says we ought to stop this fight." Other guards emerged and gathered around the blonde.

"Do you think it will work?" Helen Five asked anxiously.

"It's got to work," Bartlett answered. "They don't have any choice."

The guards conferred in whispers, then the blonde came forward. She smiled boldly. "It's a deal. Come on, girls!" Throwing her useless weapon at Bartlett's head, she charged the door of the control room.

ALL THAT stood in her way was a man, a creature for whom she

had no respect. To her way of thinking, all that had to be done was to knock this man down and charge the control room. Once inside, force of numbers alone would overcome the women with Helen Five.

With the possible exception of the turnkey, no woman in this matriarchy of the future had ever gotten a harder shock than did this blonde policewoman. Bartlett dodged the gun she threw at him, he stepped to one side and swung his fist.

He had never struck a harder blow in his life.

"I tried to be nice," he said. "And you wouldn't have any of it. Now you see what you get."

The blonde's head popped backward as the fist landed on the point of her chin, her eyes bugged open, her knees came unhinged, and she went backward into the women following her.

She was one of the most surprised blondes who ever lived on earth.

"Gast!" Bartlett shouted.

"You bet," the trooper answered.

"Stand guard over the smaller switchboard. Knock the living day-lights out of any woman who tries to turn on the juice."

"You bet!" Gast echoed. Vast enthusiasm sounded in his voice.

"The rest of you stand beside me!" Bartlett shouted.

"We're right with you, George!" a voice answered. Footsteps sounded as the other three took up their positions with him.

They stood in the doorway of the control room of this city of the future, four men out of the past, facing with bare fists the attack of infuriated, charging women. The fight they fought there was an echo of an earlier fight fought in the dawn of history when men once before had fought women not so much for the right to

rule as for the right to hold up their heads and call themselves men, the ancient unforgotten battle of the matriarchy. Every blow they struck was an echo of an earlier blow.

The guards charged that control room as if they too sensed that on the outcome of this battle their newly-established dominance depended. Bartlett struck until all feeling had left his fists. Beside him panting men did the same. Not a blow they struck would kill or even do serious harm to anything except the pride of these women who had considered themselves fit to boss a world. When the fight was finished, women were sprawled knee deep in front of the door.

A whimpering wail was running through the room.

But the women had had enough. All they could do was whimper.

Inside the control room Bartlett heard the sounds of another scuffle. Turning, he saw Gast in front of the switchboard, battling with Helen Five and the women with her.

"They wanted to turn on the juice and shoot you in the back!" Gast shouted.

"Come on, boys," Bartlett shouted. "We've got another little job to do."

Slamming shut the control room door, they waded in. When they had finished, Gast still stood in front of the switchboard. Bartlett was speaking to Helen Five. "So you would have gunned us in the back?"

"No. No! I wouldn't have done it. I swear I wouldn't. Only you looked so much like a savage standing there in the door that I was frightened."

She was really frightened now.

"I told you I was part savage," Bartlett answered. "But you didn't seem to believe it. And now do you know what is going to happen?"

She shrank away.

From outside came a shout that gathered into a roar.

"There's a whole mob of women outside the barrier," Nolan shouted.

VISIBLE in the glow from the barrier were hundreds of women. With the failure of the ray guns, they had realized the source of the trouble and had sought the power station. Visible among them was Neeta, the Matriarch. They were shouting and shaking fists at the station.

"They can't get in," Helen Five whispered. "We're safe here." She seemed to find a crumb of comfort in the thought.

"That's where you're wrong," Bartlett said. "They can get in."

"But—how—the barrier—"

He laughed, moved to the switchboards. "We're going to invite them in. This switchboard, I believe you told me, controls the web barrier around the station?"

"Y-yes. But you're not—"

"I certainly am. Without ray weapons, they'll never be able to blast us out of this control room in time—"

"In time for what?"

"In time to do us any damage before our friends get here."

He yanked open the switch. The electronic barrier protecting the power station collapsed. Helen Five wailed in growing anguish and fear.

Outside the startled mob of women hesitated for a moment. There was something about this sudden collapsing of the barrier that they didn't like. Then, urged by the shrill voice of Neeta, they moved forward.

Bartlett grinned. "Stand by the control room doors, boys, and knock 'em down if they manage to get the doors out of the way."

"You bet!"

He moved to the big switchboard.

"And this panel controls the barrier that protects the city?"

As she sensed his intention, Helen Five's wail became a yell of fear. "But they're savages, I tell you. They're cannibals!"

"They're no more savages and cannibals than I am," Bartlett answered. "Want to bet on it?"

He jerked open the switch.

A glow of light vanished from the sky as the barrier protecting the city collapsed.

"You were willing to go to them once. If you had really believed they are cannibals, why would you have taken that chance?"

"But—with you to protect me—"

He nodded approvingly. "That's the proper attitude. That'll get you some place, that idea. Now to see how the ladies outside take what has happened—"

He moved to a vision port.

Outside a wave of women had moved toward the power station. They intended to take it apart stone by stone and dig out of the ruins the criminals inside. Or what they thought were criminals. But every woman of them was instantly aware, by the glow of light fading from the sky, that the barrier protecting the city was down.

That one fact hit every mother's daughter of them as no other fact could have hit them. It made them instantly aware of the fact that they were women and of the thousand and one fringe meanings that went along with that fact.

They were women. And outside the city were men.

Men that they had been taught were savages and cannibals, men that they had been taught to fear and to hate.

The rolling wave of women halted as if it had run into a stone wall.

A wailing chorus rose in the air.

"The barrier is down."

"That means the men will come."

"The men! And the men will—"

What the men would do to them was drowned in the growing tumult of sound.

Abruptly the sound died.

Borne by a drifting wind, from the far distances came another chorus of shouts.

Different shouts, pitched lower, set in a different key.

"In the spring there are always hordes of men outside the barrier," Helen Five whispered. "They're coming."

Bartlett grinned. "How nice," he said.

"Yes, for the men."

"And nice for the women too, when they get used to it. As they will, sister, as they will. And they'll learn to like it too." Again he grinned.

OUTSIDE the power station the mob of women, remembering things that they had never forgotten in their hearts, began to flee. But the group of foraging hunters nearest the city, drawn there yearly at this season by a vast hunger, happened to be horsemen. Hooves began to clatter in the streets. Bartlett was startled at the thought of horsemen. Somehow he had forgotten that there were such things as horses in the world and that a civilization on its way backward might rediscover the use of the horse.

Horsemen armed with long lances, with bows and arrows, and with ropes, all weapons that could be constructed by a technology moving backward toward primitive times, surged in the streets of the city before the mob of women could escape.

Ropes snaked through the air, lassoing women trying to flee. Men

shouted in high enjoyment. Women screamed. Everywhere men were jumping from their horses. Whether they liked it or not women were going up behind saddles.

But not a lance had been dipped, not a bow had been unslung.

"See!," Bartlett said to Helen Five.

They moved out of the control room to the front steps of the power station.

A man drew rein in front of them, looked from a startled face down toward Bartlett. He was a powerful specimen in the full strength of vigorous manhood.

"Does he look like a cannibal to you?" Bartlett questioned.

"But—what are they doing to the women?"

The horseman snorted. "What the hell do you think we're doing, sister? We're catching mates. This is the time of year for it." He stared boldly at Helen Five, started forward, his intentions unmistakable. "What about you?" His gaze came down to Bartlett. "Is she yours, brother?"

The badly frightened Helen Five shrank close to him.

"She's mine," Bartlett answered.

"Okay," the horseman answered. "There's plenty of other fish—" His rope snaked out, to catch a trim blonde who was trying to flee. Roaring with laughter, he descended from his horse.

For a moment the blonde tried to struggle. Then her struggles ceased. She was giggling as he helped her up.

"You see?" Bartlett said.

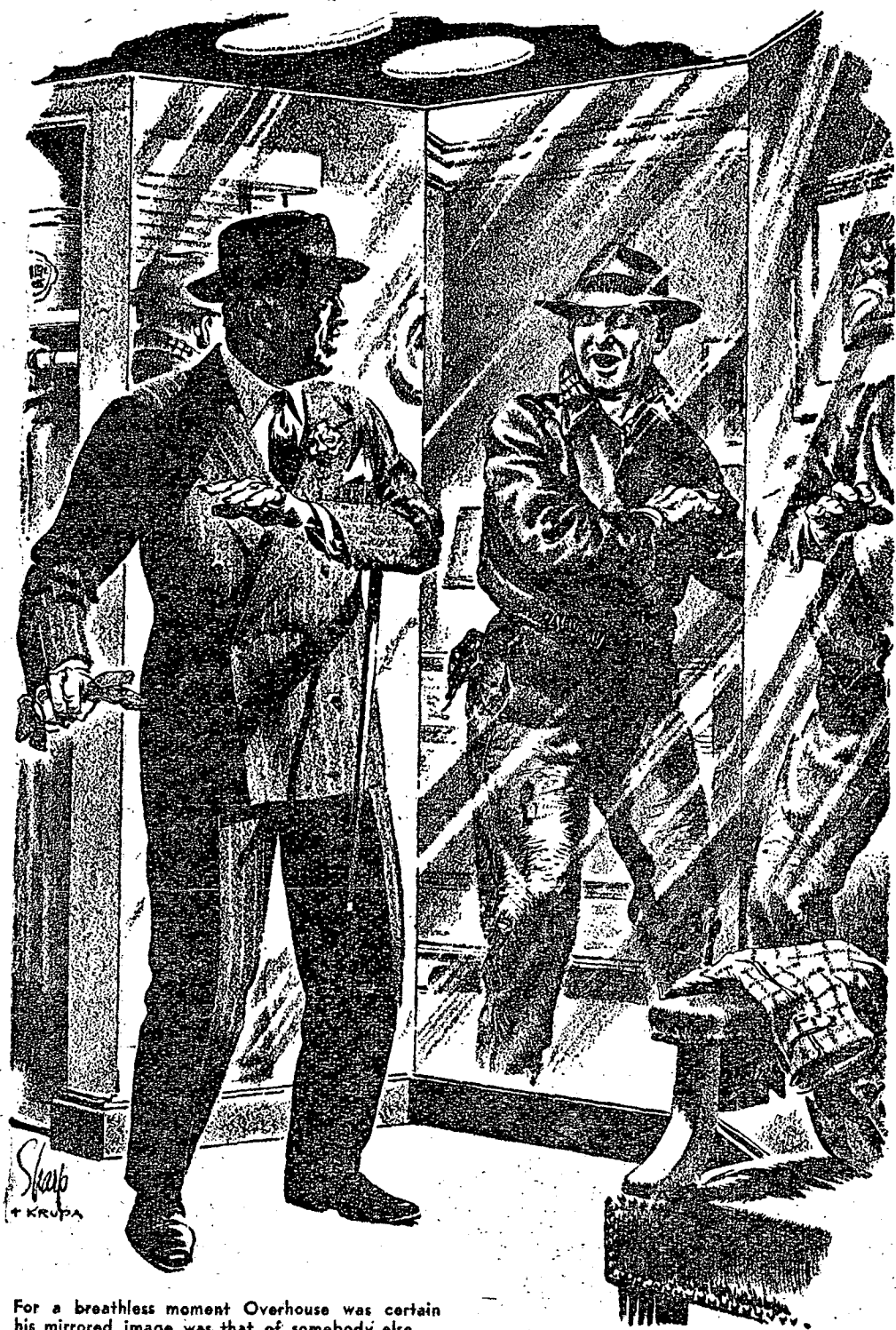
"But—"

"That's the way it's got to be. You women have been kidding yourselves. There's nothing any one of you wants more than she wants a man."

"But—"

"And you too, sister. You're no dif-

(Concluded on page 181)



For a breathless moment Overhouse was certain his mirrored image was that of somebody else...

"IF YOU WERE ME..."

By Rog Phillips

Blair would have been certain to lose the case if he hadn't recalled the adage:

"Put yourself in the other man's place!"

VINCE BLAIR picked up his ringing phone without lifting his eyes from the legal papers he was reading. "Yes?" he said absently.

"Mr. Blair," the efficient voice of his trim receptionist sounded in his ear, "there is a Mr. Ralph Overhouse to see you." Her voice took on the almost imperceptible tone of stubbornness it assumed when she formed a firm opinion. "I think you should see him."

"Have him wait," Vince said. Then, with an irritated frown, "Oh, all right. Send him in."

"I'll send *them* in," her voice answered, pert, laughing in its tone.

Vince saw what she meant when the door opened. A stocky man with a large, Nordic face entered, followed by a rather shapeless woman and seven children, ranging in age from three years to fifteen. The clothes they wore would have been refused by the Salvation Army as too worn to pass on.

The man, evidently the Mr. Ralph Overhouse, wore faded overalls that showed signs of being freshly laundered. His hair was pasted down with unaccustomed orderliness. The woman, obviously the man's wife, wore the habitual tired expression of the

mother of a large family. The seven children had that expression of insolent defiance and independence that is the heritage of the slums.

The last child in, a twelve-year-old girl, closed the door with an air of being afraid to make a noise. Then, for a moment, the nine visitors stood uncomfortably in the center of the room, while Vince studied them with a mixture of amusement and amazement.

"Well?" he said abruptly, with a disarming smile.

"Mr. Blair," the man said in a pleading voice, "the landlord is putting us out. Everyone knows you're the greatest lawyer in the city. We've come to you for help. Please help us to keep from being evicted."

"It's nice of you to have such confidence in me," Vince said, smiling, "but I'm afraid you've come to the wrong place. The rent control office is where you should go."

"We've been there," Mr. Overhouse said quietly.

"Oh," Vince said. "I see. Well, you can get a good lawyer that specializes in such cases and make your landlord take it to court."

"It's been to court," Mr. Overhouse said, still quietly, his eyes on

the design of the office rug.

"Oh," Vince said. His smile vanished. "What do you do for a living, Mr. Overhouse?"

"I'm a janitor in the Main building," came the answer.

Vince studied the subdued group. Nine mouths to be fed, nine bodies to clothe—on a hundred and fifty dollars a month. And this family was being put out on the street. What could they get? Nothing. Any place large enough to house them would cost at least a hundred and fifty a month for rent alone. The tenements they could afford were filled—and filled again with relatives of tenants, crowded into small unhealthful rooms.

The case had been in court. Since Mr. Overhouse was here, asking for help, the court had upheld the application for eviction. Within thirty days the Overhouses must get out or be thrown out by force.

"Who is your landlord?" he asked.

"Frank Croft!" Mr. Overhouse fairly spat the name.

Vince lifted his eyebrow. He had heard of Frank Croft. A stocky man, not unlike Ralph Overhouse in general build and appearance, he had risen from poverty by what was generally rumored to be a series of shady deals. Utterly unmerciless, he had forced more than one man to the wall in his climb to riches.

The Internal Revenue department had gotten on his tail several years back—only to find that he had shrewdly pyramided his riches in such a way that his real income could not be taxed until and unless he changed them into cash.

The vague thought Vince had had of talking to the landlord and playing on his humanitarian instincts was definitely a useless idea.

Frank Croft had in all probability gotten the place Overhouse lived in

for less than the price of a song, and he was probably using it as a pawn in some of his tax-evading tactics. He would care nothing about the welfare of this family standing so uncomfortably in the center of Vince's office, high up in the June Building, its windows overlooking the vast honeycomb of buildings that was the center of Bigtown.

Vince wished there was something he could do. But what?

The phone rang. "Excuse me, please," Vince said as he picked up the receiver. "Hello? Oh, hello, George. Just a minute. Hang on, will you?" Then, to Mr. Overhouse, "Leave your name and address with the receptionist. I promise I'll look into this right away, and—" he smiled into Mrs. Overhouse's tear-brightened eyes—"if there is any possible way to keep your home for you, I promise I'll find it and keep your roof over your heads."

"Oh, thank you," Mr. Overhouse said effusively. "See, mama? I told you he would help us!"

Mrs. Overhouse's lips trembled. She turned away silently. Vince felt something choking in his throat as the nine assorted Overhouses trailed from the office.

"All right, George," Vince spoke into the phone. . . .

VINCE FOLLOWED George into his large, comfortable library, and, tossing his topcoat carelessly onto one chair, dropped with a tired sigh into another. George Stevens sat down slowly, then:

"Roll up your sleeve," George Stevens said seriously.

He tapped the tip of his fingers on the arm of his chair while Vince Blair complied. Then:

"Examine the skin of your forearm carefully," he ordered. "Be sure there

are no fresh scratches or pinpricks."

Mystified, Vince searched every square inch of the bleached skin of his arm from the elbow down to the wrist. There was not so much as a pimple.

"What's this all about, George?" he asked good-naturedly. He was often amused at the deadpan seriousness of his friend George Stevens, whom he had known and chummed around with since college days. George had majored in biochemistry, while he had majored in law. Between them, during college and through the five years since they received their degrees, had grown a comfortable friendship that continued sporadically. Sometimes they were together often. Sometimes they didn't see each other for months. Yet if one dropped in at the other's apartment their greeting was as casual as if they had seen each other the day before.

"What's it all about?" George echoed. "Wait until I fix us a drink and I'll tell you."

He went to the walnut liquor cabinet and pulled its doors open revealing glistening glassware and orderly bottles. While he mixed the drinks Vince looked around the room idly. The walls were solid with books on the two ends of the large, rectangular room. A third wall provided the backdrop for a disorderly desk, a console radio-phonograph and several cabinets of albums, and four rather amateurish canvases which George's mother had painted in her younger days, and had left him when she died.

George brought the drinks he had mixed, giving one to Vince and sinking down into his comfortable chair, crossing his legs.

"See how you like your drink," he said.

Vince sipped it reflectively. His

eyebrows lifted in delighted surprise.

"Why that's the best bourbon I've ever tasted!" he exclaimed.

"Same old bourbon." George Stevens said. "I just added a pinch of a tasteless powder I discovered recently. It does nothing but enhance the flavors of other things. A sort of taste stimulator. Drink it down."

He watched, a smile quirking his well-formed lips, while Vince drank the rest of the drink with obvious relish. Then, abruptly, he glanced at his watch, comparing it with the clock on the desk.

"What time do you have, Vince?" he asked.

"Why," Vince glanced at his watch, "it's five after four."

"That's what I've got," George said. His eyes went to the windows beside the radio console. Sunlight streamed in between the lattices of the venetian blinds. "Three or four months from now," he said absently, "it will be sunset about this time. I'll be turning on the lights about now. Automobiles passing on the street will have their headlights on, and when they enter the street from Hillman Avenue their lights will flash into that window."

Vince turned his eyes to the window and blinked in surprise. It was dark outside. A car turned into the street from the sidestreet. For a brief instant its headlights flashed directly into the window.

As he turned his head to look questioningly at George his eyes were arrested by the desk clock. Its hands pointed to ten o'clock. He looked up at the ceiling. The fluorescent lights were glowing brightly.

"Look at your arm," George suggested quietly.

Vince obeyed. There was a small red dot where a needle of some sort had pierced the skin.

"Am I going out of my mind?" he asked, amazed. "You couldn't possibly have gotten out of your chair without my knowing it. Don't tell me you're going in for magic!"

His eyes turned back to the clock. He compared it with his watch again. They both agreed. It was ten o'clock.

"I don't get it," he said, his voice half frightened. "You might have changed the clock by remote control. It's possible that prick on my arm could have been made by some sort of blow tube with a very fine needle. But you couldn't possibly have turned my wristwatch ahead without my being aware of it. I would have to have been unconscious—and I haven't blinked my eyes even."

"Haven't you?" George Stevens asked quietly.

VINCE BLAIR stared at George Stevens' calm, slightly smirking, placid face with wide, startled eyes. What he read there made the hair on his scalp tingle strangely. He *had* been unconscious—for six hours. And without being aware of having lost and regained consciousness, nor of the lapse of time.

When had it happened? He thought back. He had looked at his watch and seen that it was five after four. Seconds later he had turned his head to look out the window. When he looked out the window it was dark! So it had been six hours from the time he looked at his watch until his eyes rested on the window. And during that time he had been aware of nothing at all.

He looked into George's eyes and saw only friendly good humor there. It was his old friend, George Stevens. The guy he had roomed with in college. The friend who had loaned him two hundred dollars once and pretended to have completely forgotten it when he paid it back a year later

after his law practice got on a paying basis.

If it had been anyone else there, in that chair, those smiling eyes would have seemed sinister and mysterious. He would have been afraid of them. He was almost afraid anyway.

"All right," he said, relaxing. "Don't keep me in suspense. How'd you do it?"

"It was in the drink," George said. "My latest discovery in biochemistry. It's a drug that creates unconsciousness without your being aware of the lapse into unconsciousness. That prick in your arm is from administering the antidote."

"Whew!" Vince Blair said, expelling a long breath. "For a minute I thought you were practicing black art."

"Perhaps it is black magic," George said. "The drug is found in a certain plant that grows wild in China. It's a deadly poison in even minute doses. I've been studying non-lethal effects of quite a few violent poisons during the past few months. That's how I discovered the peculiar property of it."

"What is it?" Vince asked.

George shook his head. "I'll keep that secret to myself," he said. "At least until I've made a more thorough study of the stuff and its effects."

Vince's eyes took on a faraway look.

"That stuff has possibilities," he said dreamily. "Imagine walking into a hospital and sitting down to wait for them to put you to bed—only to find that without any conscious lapse of time you've had your appendix out and healed up, and are ready to go home."

"You're taking it for granted it would act that long," George said, laughing tolerantly. Then he frowned.

"It might. I haven't tried it yet. But I rather think it would wear off in less time than that." He stretched his legs luxuriously and yawned. "In all probability all it's good for is tricks like the one I just played on you."

"You really had me going," Vince admitted. "If you'd left me under its effects for exactly twenty-four hours and said nothing, I would have forever after wondered what became of that lost day."

"I wish I'd thought of it," George said regretfully. "That would have been a better trick than mine."

"You know," Vince said, sitting forward, "this intrigues me no end. There's all sorts of things we could do with it. You wouldn't mind co-operating with me and using it to play a trick on a friend of mine, would you?"

"Of course not," George said, smiling broadly. "What've you got in mind?"

"N-nothing yet," Vince hesitated. "I've got a couple of ideas in mind, but I'd like to think about them. I'll drop over tomorrow or give you a ring and tell you what I've cooked up. There's one particular fellow I'd like to work something good on."

"O.K., Vince," George said. "You'll have to excuse me now. I have several things that need attending to in the lab."

VINCE SHOOK hands with his departing client. When the door closed, he returned to his desk and picked up the phone. When his receptionist's voice sounded he said, "Hold up the others for a few minutes. And get me George Stevens on the phone."

"Hello, George," he said a moment later. "This is Vince."

"I was just about to call you," George's voice replied. "The new technique on the antidote I've been

working on is about O.K. now."

"Fine," Vince said. "You haven't told me, but I imagine it's to eliminate the hypo."

"That's right," George said. "You've heard of capsules that dissolve in the stomach—the thicker the capsule the longer it takes?"

"I've heard of them," Vince said, "but how will that tie in?"

"I started on that angle," George said. "What I wanted was the antidote in almost submicroscopic particles, each in a capsule."

"Huh?" Vince said, startled.

"What I did," George explained, "was to coat fine crystals of the antidote with a film of gelatin. And if you think it was as easy as it sounds—it wasn't. But I got it! The antidote, soluble in fats, water, alcohol, and almost anything else, coated with gelatin to make a fine powder that can be mixed with a drink without being perceptible, and not taking effect until a definite interval has passed. Now the drug and the antidote can be taken together, and the antidote doesn't work until we want it to."

"You mean you've got it now so that with one simple operation, the dropping of a powder into a drink, a person's mind can develop a blank period of any length of time, down to the minute?" Vince asked, delighted.

"That's right," George admitted. "Remember when you called me the day after I pulled that trick on you? The reason I said it would be about ten days before I could do anything was because after you left I got to thinking of the possibilities of the thing as a parlor trick, and realized that the main objection to that was the need of the hypo. Eliminate that, and it would be O.K.. The coated crystals are the answer."

"Wonderfull!" Vince exclaimed.

"Tell me, how short a time can a mind be blanked now?"

"It takes a couple of minutes for the drug to do its work," George said. "About ten minutes of blank is the shortest I can make it now. With a little more refinement I can cut it down a little more."

"How about uniformity?" Vince asked thoughtfully. "Could the same dose be given to several people and have them blank out together and come to together?"

"Within seconds," George said positively. "Both the drug and the antidote are quick acting."

"Something else," Vince said. "I forgot to ask you. How does it affect a person? They are asleep under it, I suppose?"

"Only partly," George said. "A person under the drug is somewhat like a sleepwalker. For example, when you were under it you continued to sit up and appear to be awake. I even had you stand up and walk around the room."

"Then it could be given to someone in my office," Vince interrupted, "and he could walk right out with me along, and no one would suspect it?"

"Not unless someone tried to talk to him," George said.

VINCE WALKED the two short blocks from his office building to the public garage. From there he drove his cream-colored coupe toward a section of the city where pawnshops, second-hand stores, and a mixture of card rooms, pool rooms, and so-called beer parlors comprised ninety-nine percent of the business frontage.

Sandwiched into this ninety-nine percent was a narrow stairway behind an unprepossessing door. It led upward into a gloomy hallway that echoed Vince's footsteps with un-

usual loudness as he walked toward a grimy window of the type with chicken wire imbedded beneath its surface.

Half way to the window he paused before a varnished door and knocked. A chair scraped somewhere the other side of the door, and footsteps approached. After a silence the door opened a crack and a jaundiced eye appeared.

The eye unjaundiced into a crinkling expression of pleasure. The door swung open, revealing a small man with an even smaller face, with legs habitually widespread and arms habitually held out from his body so that the effect was that of four limbs, rather than arms and legs. His lips were thin, his complexion smooth, his face having the appearance of beardlessness rather than of being close shaven. His hair, fine of texture and jet black, formed a sparse, rather careless pompadour.

"Come on in, counselor," the man invited, swinging the door wide open.

"Hi, Jerome," Vince said, stepping inside. He took off his topcoat, looked around for a place to hang it, and tossed it on the unmade bed.

"Could you do a job for me?" he asked, sitting down on the sturdiest of the two wooden chairs.

"Sure could," Jerome said, chuckling knowingly.

"It should be easy—for you," Vince said, a smile of amusement flashing over his lips. He fully realized the ends this little man would go for him. If it were not for him Jerome would this very minute be upstate at the penitentiary because he couldn't resist an opportunity to practice his art.

"What's the pitch?" Jerome asked.

"All I want you to do," Vince said, "is to take two men who have a similar build, and make one look ex-

actly like the other, and the other look exactly like the first."

"Exchange their looks," Jerome said with a nod. "That could be easy, all right. And then again it could be hard. But it would be the kind of a thing I'd like—right in my line, so to speak."

"That's what I thought," Vince said dryly. The count he had gotten Jerome free on was complicity in a bank robbery where one of the bandits had been disguised to look exactly like one of the vice presidents.

"How good a job does it have to be?" Jerome asked professionally.

"The very best," Vince said. "I want it so good that the man disguised can't even penetrate his own disguise."

"You mean he won't know?" Jerome asked. "Haw. Of course he would. You were just pulling my leg."

"But I wasn't," Vince said. "You've hit it. One of the men, at least, won't know that he's disguised. He'll suspect it, and he may try every way he can think of to prove to himself it's a disguise."

Jerome studied Vince with a serious scowl.

"I'd like to see those two men before I try it," he said. "I'll have to study the similarities and differences, and do some planning and studying. Within limits, what you want can be done. I can build up tissue with subcutaneous paraffin injection so that it can't be detected. I can change skin color perfectly. But if the eyes have to be altered much, or if this disguise has to stand up too long, it's going to be almost impossible."

"If anyone can do it, you can, Jerome," Vince said.

Jerome dipped his head. "When and where can I see these two men?"

"Come up to my office around lunch time tomorrow," Vince said.

"You can meet the one who will know about it all there, and study him closely. Then we'll have lunch at a spot where the other man usually eats. I've arranged to have a table next to his. You can spend an hour studying him, without him being aware of it."

"Suits me," Jerome said.

Vince took out a clip of currency and pulled out five twenties.

"Aw, counselor," Jerome said, a hurt look in his eyes. "You know I'd do anything for you, for nothing." But he took the money quickly, grinning.

VINCE left Jerome's place. Fifteen minutes he was at the other end of the city. When he turned off Hillman Street to pull up in front of George Stevens' rambling house, he thought of the time two weeks before when he had turned from glancing at his watch at four o'clock to look out the window at another car turning as he was doing.

It seemed incredible even now that the human consciousness could blank out like that for six hours without the slightest conscious break or lapse of time, yet he had experienced it himself, and knew it had happened!

George answered the door and let him in, an eager curiosity on his face. "Come on into the library," he said. "I'm anxious to hear what you've been cooking up. I perfected this thing just for you, you know." His lips quirked into a smile.

Vince grinned and led the way into the library.

"How about a drink?" George asked. He laughed at the suspicious look that appeared on Vince's face. "I promise I won't doctor it."

"O.K.," Vince said. "Bourbon."

"Now out with it," George said when he had served the liquor and was settled comfortably with his own drink.

"I'm working on a little real life soap opera," Vince began. He told the plight of the Overhouses, and the background of Frank Croft, their landlord. "The law's on Croft's side," he went on. "He has a court order permitting him to evict these people. There's nothing legal I can do to stop it."

"I gathered that," George said. "And even if there was, I strongly suspect this new drug so intrigues you that you'd go ahead with what you have in mind anyway. Right?"

"Oh, I don't know," Vince said smugly. "This is what I want to do. I want to get Croft up to my office and plead with him—offer him a drink—and then ask him how he would feel if things were reversed, and he were Ralph Overhouse."

"Gad!" George exclaimed in delight. "I see it all. Without an apparent break of mental continuity he suddenly finds himself at the Overhouse shanty, to all intents and purposes Papa Overhouse himself, threatened with eviction. Black magic! Wonderful. But all he would have to do is look in a mirror..."

"That's taken care of," Vince said. "One of the finest masters of living sculpture alive today is going to transform his face and body into an exact duplicate of Overhouse's. There may be a few details he can't change, but by the time Croft finds them he won't be sure enough of his sanity to form any positive conclusions from the meager evidence left him. I haven't told the Overhouses about it yet. In fact I wasn't sure I could get Jerome, the master at disguise, to work on it until just before I came over here."

"Why don't you keep it from the Overhouses too?" George asked, an excited twinkle in his eyes. "I can just see it now. The kids insisting

he's Papa Overhouse, and him insisting he isn't. It wouldn't work so well if they were in on it."

"Say!" Vince exclaimed. "I hadn't thought of the kids. If they knew, they'd give it away for sure. It would be really convincing if *none* of them knew a thing about it—not even Ralph Overhouse himself. Do you think they'd be co-operative enough while they're blanked out so that we could sort of get them home and to bed,"

"I think so," George said.

"I could get Croft up to my office the same day, and after he blanked out I could hide him in the wall safe," Vince mused. "Then I could have Ralph Overhouse come up after work and give him his knockout drops. Then Jerome could work them over. After dark you and I could get them out of the building, maybe feeding them enough drinks so that they'd be really drunk. Then we could put each of them in a taxi and send them home, paying the driver of the cabs ahead of time...and no one would suspect. You know, no matter how this works out, it will be interesting."

"Poor Mrs. Overhouse though," George said sadly, shaking his head. "She'll think papa is crazy from worry and has delusions he's Croft. Maybe she'll even call a psychiatrist. I'd like to see that! A psychiatrist trying to convince a man he isn't himself!" He and Vince burst into loud roars of laughter at the thought.

"You mean," Vince gasped, "trying to prove to him he is himself."

"Now you've got *me* confused!" George roared almost spilling his drink as he shook with mirth.

VINCE BLAIR rose as Frank Croft pushed through the door, and walked around his desk to meet him, studying his features and decid-

ing it would take all of Jerome's skill to make them into the Overhouse physiognomy. None of these thoughts showed on his face as he shook hands cordially with the unscrupulous Mr. Croft, however.

"I've always wanted to meet you, Frank," Vince said. "I even turned down a case once that would have involved me against you—just," he added with a sly, knowing wink, "in case we ever got together and found we could do business."

"That's mighty nice of you—er, Blair," Croft said, studying the lawyer shrewdly.

"Vince," Vince said. "Just call me Vince. All my friends do. What do you take—scotch or bourbon or rye? I even have some rum if you prefer that." He stepped over to the liquor cabinet and cocked his head inquiringly.

The drug and its sealed-in antidote were in the bottom of one of the gleaming glasses, unnoticeable. Whatever Croft expressed a preference for, Vince was going to take something else so the glasses wouldn't get mixed.

"Why," Croft said, visibly relaxing, "my favorite is rye with just a dash of cream soda."

"Coming up," Vince grinned. He watched the liquor pick up the fine powder and swirl it out of existence. He mixed himself a bourbon and ginger ale, gave Croft his drink, and walked around the desk to his chair.

Croft settled down in an armchair, looking at his drink and swirling it idly, obviously waiting for Vince to make his opening move in whatever business he had in mind. Vince, watching him, discerned the cunning and shrewdness that had made Croft able to climb on the backs of helpless people up the ladder of financial success.

Vince sipped his drink with elab-

orate casualness, grinning over the top of his glass at his guest. Croft followed his example, taking a polite sip, deciding it was excellent rye and taking a larger swallow.

"What are you planning on doing with the Overhouse place?" Vince shot without warning.

"Why?" Croft asked. "You have a client interested in buying that property?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Well, I doubt if I care to sell it. I already have something planned for that property."

"What?" Vince asked.

"Just between you and me," Croft said in a confidential tone, "I plan on razing the house and charging it up to loss against my gains on some property that turned out too profitable this last year."

"I see," Vince said, hiding the bitterness in his tones as much as possible. He hesitated. Was Croft the type that would forget—or gulp—his drink when angry. He decided the man wouldn't be one to waste a good drink. "You're evicting the Overhouses just for a thing like that?" he mocked incredulously.

Croft mistook his meaning.

"Oh, it was something different," he said smugly. "I couldn't mention my real motive in court. I had a friend in the building-code office condemn the place and list repairs that would be prohibitive."

"Of course," Vince murmured. He looked up at the ceiling, his jaw jutted speculatively. "I wonder how you would feel about it—if you were Overhouse with his wife and seven kids? I mean—to be faced with eviction and no place you could possibly move to on your lousy hundred and fifty a month that barely keeps the grocery bill down?"

Frank Croft's face hardened. He looked at his drink, then drank it all

down in one deep gulp.

"Looky here," he said. "If you're representing the Overhouses—"

"Oh, but I'm not, really," Vince said soothingly. "I was just wondering...if by some freak of fate you were to suddenly *become* Overhouse, facing eviction..."

He let his voice die down. Frank Croft's eyes had suddenly lost their alert glint. The man was just sitting there, his face expressionless, the glass still held in his hand.

Vince got up and took the glass from slack fingers and put it on the desk blotter.

"Stand up," he ordered in a mild tone. Croft got to his feet, his movements slow. Taking his arm, Vince led him over to the storage safe that formed a generous-sized closet in one corner of the office.

He came back and took a chair in. When he closed the safe door until it was open a mere crack, Croft was sitting in there, awake but unaware of a thing.

"**YOU** WANTED to see me, Mr. Blair?" Ralph Overhouse asked eagerly, hat in hand, as he came into the office. "You have some news?"

"Sit down for a minute, Mr. Overhouse," Vince said, looking up from some legal documents—he was pretending to read. "Uh—this will take a little longer. I'll fix you a drink to sip while you're waiting. What do you like?" He rose and went to the liquor cabinet. The glasses were freshly washed and dried, and in the bottom of one of them was a thin layer of the fine white powder.

"Anything. Anything," Ralph Overhouse said in stunned gratefulness at this unusual treatment.

"How about some good scotch and soda?" Vince asked. At Overhouse's

numb nod he made the drink. Carrying it over to him he held it out, then paused, as though an idea had struck him. "I'll bet you'd have fun if you and Croft were reversed, and you were he," he said jocularly.

"Oh, I don't know," Ralph Overhouse said, his hand suspended toward the glass hopefully. "One thing I know, I wouldn't evict helpless tenants if I were him."

"But if *you* were—suddenly, let us say—to find yourself to be Frank Croft," Vince insisted, "and you *knew* he was you, and at your mercy—?" With a sly smile he let Overhouse take the glass and went back to his desk.

Ralph Overhouse took a deep gulp and choked slightly at the unaccustomed alcohol.

"I don't know." He glanced at the lawyer and let his voice trail off when he saw he wasn't, apparently, listening. His lips worked in growing viciousness at some inner thought. After a moment of this he brought the glass to his lips and drained it, then set it slowly down on the desk, a far-away light in his eyes. A moment later the dreamy look took on a subtle change. His eyes were blank.

Vince, who had been watching from the corner of his eye, scooped up the phone and asked his receptionist to call a number, and to let no one in except a man by the name of Jerome, and also George Stevens when he came....

"**PAPA!**" A female voice sounded in Frank Croft's ears. "Get up. You'll be late for work."

He blinked his eyes and decided it was a vivid dream, and closed them again, sputtering into a deep snore.

"Papa!" A hand was shaking him. Angrily he tried to brush the hand away, but his own caught in the bed-

clothes and couldn't reach up.

Exasperated, he opened his eyes and rolled over. His eyes settled on the strange woman and the unfamiliar backdrop of a cheap, cluttered bedroom. At the same instant the realization came to him that a mere second ago he had been sitting in a chair in a lawyer's office. Or had it been a mere second ago? No...it was quite a while ago. Things began to clarify in his mind. One second he had been awake, the next second he had been asleep, but half awake, and then he had dozed, feeling that something was wrong, but too sleepy to stay awake and find out.

"Papa," the strange, shapeless female said reproachfully. "You got drunk last night. Shame on you. Now you get up and go to work. It's bad enough we get evicted today. You musn't lose your job too."

Evicted! Frank Croft sat up in bed, oblivious of his lack of dress under the force of the memory that word had evoked. Was this Mrs. Overhouse?

"Are you Mrs. Overhouse?" His voice was hoarse. It sounded strange to his new suspicious ears.

"How you joke, papa," the strange female said. "Now stop it and get up." She yanked the covers off of him completely.

His gasp shattered against the walls of the empty room as the woman hurried out, paying no attention to his nakedness.

He slid his feet to the floor, slowly, a glowering, thoughtful expression on his face. When he stood up he swayed slightly, shaking his head carefully. There was a dull ache in it now.

The dresser, loaded down with cheap cosmetics and a mixture of socks, women's stockings, and too many things to bother to recognize,

had a large mirror with a flaked back and a dusty surface pivoted on two curved wood supports in back. He staggered the two steps necessary to bring him in front of the mirror and leaned forward toward it, his eyes looking into it at his reflection.

What he saw made him groan. He remembered Overhouse—and it was Overhouse's homely face that stared out at him.

"It's a nightmare," he muttered doubtfully. But a thought whispered that no nightmare could be so real.

"Papa!" the obnoxious female shouted from the doorway.

"Get out!" Frank Croft shouted angrily, but his voice was blotted out by the angry slamming of the door.

Muttering, he searched for his clothes. On a chair crowded into one corner was some long underwear, largely holes and crude patches. Under the underwear was a pair of worn-out overalls. On the floor under the chair was a pair of cheap socks with holes in the heels and a pair of nearly worn-out work shoes with laces broken and tied into knots in several places.

He started to search for his own clothes, then remembered the obnoxious female and put on the clothes on the chair. They fitted. Twice while dressing he went to the mirror and studied his features closely.

He finished lacing the shoes and straightened up. Suddenly beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. He groaned again.

"Papa!" The obnoxious female's voice was very sharp and demanding. She was standing in the doorway. She continued to stand there, glaring angrily at him.

He gave her a look that should have made her shrink back in alarm. It had no effect. With another groan he stood up.

"Where's the bathroom?" he asked.

There was a highpitched explosive sound from the woman. She came up to him and slapped him sharply, her fingers stinging his cheek.

"Now you get in the bathroom and shave, and no more of your nonsense," she said shrilly. "You have seven children to support. Get busy."

"O.K.," he breathed hoarsely. It was more an answer to his own inner problem than to her demand. He thought, "So I'm Overhouse now. So to hell with it. If Overhouse had had any sense he would have ditched this shrew long ago. I'll do it for him."

HE PUSHED past her rudely and left the room. Outside the door he turned his head right and left and saw the open door of a bathroom. He half stumbled to it and slammed the door.

The tub was an ancient four legged thing, cracked and stained. Its faucets dripped noisily. The toilet seat was split, an unsanitary thing of bare wood that showed little signs of the varnish that had once covered its surface. Both faucets in the filthy washbasin ran thin, steady streams, and both streams were ice cold.

Above the washbasin was a dirty shelf on which rested a shaving mug with dried soap suds in it, and an ancient straight-edge razor. And hanging on a hook to the right of the washstand was a large, completely threadbare, completely dirty, solitary towel.

There were several toothbrushes in a drinking glass on the shelf by the razor. A package of baking soda seemed to be the only thing resembling a dentifrice. He hesitated over this, then spilled some in the palm of his hands and, wetting a finger, dipped it in the soda and rubbed it around his teeth, rinsing them by

cupping his hand under a faucet and slurping.

"Papa!" The shrewish voice came from outside the bathroom door.

"Shut up!" Frank Croft snarled. But he speeded up nervously, his eyes darting fearfully to the closed door.

The cold shave did not alter the shade of his skin, nor did it wash away the paraffin padding that had eliminated the cruel lines that were part of the face of Frank Croft. During his shave he began to really accept the face value of things and believe that in some strange way he had been taken out of his own body and transplanted into that of Ralph Overhouse.

But if that were so, the thought came to him, he should have some of Overhouse's memories. And he had none but his own. Still, maybe that would be the way it would be.

With the soap rinsed off and patted dry with the dirty towel while he screwed his face up in disgust, he squared his shoulders for the coming ordeal.

To his relief, Mrs. Overhouse barely glanced at him when he entered the kitchen. He immediately forgot her as a wave of childlike descended upon him, engulfing him.

"Morning, papa," a chorus of voices was repeating. Hands were pulling at his overall legs. Slim arms were struggling in a battle to possess his neck. Knees were digging into his groin as two little girls tried to climb into his arms.

In self defense he put his arms around the two slim waists and drew their owners up. Their faces snuggled against his cheeks. Their lips kissed his cheeks while their voices murmured contentedly.

"Me next," other voices were demanding. It occurred to Frank Croft that Ralph Overhouse must have liked

his children very much.

He shoved the thought out of his mind and put the two girls on the floor rather roughly.

"Papa has a headache this morning," he muttered. Seven young faces showed sudden concern. He looked at them. "All right," he gave in. Religiously he kissed all seven of them.

"We got an extra one, we got an extra one," the two who had been in his arms sing-songed.

"Eat your eggs, papa," Mrs. Overhouse said, dumping two fried eggs onto a cracked plate without looking at him.

He sat down. His stomach turned at the plate, and the black flecks on the eggs themselves, from the unscoured frying pan. The seven children, adoration in their round eyes, stood about him where they could watch him. While he ate he studied them. He had always hated children—but no child had ever looked at him before as these were doing. Finally his gaze settled on one little girl. He estimated her age as about twelve or thirteen.

"What's your name?" he asked, smiling coaxingly.

"Annetta Mae," she said, laughing. "You're funny this morning, papa."

"Am I?" Frank Croft said, his features cramping into an unaccustomed smile. "Come here."

He held out his arm. She leaped forward, a glad light in her eyes. He wrapped his arm around her, and she snuggled against his side, sighing luxuriously. Her soft hair brushed his lips, tickled his nostrils. It was something he couldn't remember having ever experienced before.

"Get papa's hat and coat," Mrs. Overhouse ordered. "It's time for him to go."

There was a scamper of feet. A six-year-old boy triumphantly brought

a battered hat. A ten-year-old girl brought the stained and long unpressed suitcoat of dirty blue.

Frank Croft released his hold around the waist of Annetta Mae and stood up, shrugging into his coat and planting the hat on his head.

"By-by, mama," he said clumsily. "By, kids."

He hurried out the back door, slamming it behind him. He followed the walk around to the front and went hurriedly down the sidewalk in the direction of town.

Mrs. Overhouse stood looking at the closed back door long after he had gone. There was a strange, hurt look in her tired eyes. It was the first time in all their married life that Ralph hadn't kissed her goodbye....

RALPH OVERHOUSE opened his eyes and blinked at the ceiling. It was a soft blue, devoid of cracks and exposed lath. From somewhere music came, softly subdued. Music like none he had ever heard before.

Wonderingly he looked down at the bed he was lying in. Its sheets and blankets were like those he had seen in department stores, but never dared to touch or dreamed of owning.

Vivid in his mind was the brief moment before, when he had been sitting in Mr. Blair's office. Like scarlet letters in his mind were Mr. Blair's words, "If *you* were—suddenly, let us say—to find yourself to be Frank Croft..."

He explored the room with his eyes. It was a dream, of course. The drink Mr. Blair had given him had done something to his brain. But in this dream he was having, was he Frank Croft?

"Good morning Mr. Croft," a cultured voice spoke just behind him, as if in answer to his unvoiced question.

He jerked his eyes in the direction of the sound. A thin-faced, rather tall, soberly smiling man in black with a white shirt and black bow tie stood looking down at him.

"How are you feeling this morning, sir?" the man asked with polite concern. "Shall I draw your bath, or would you rather have breakfast first?"

Ralph's mind was working fast. He was enjoying this. It wasn't—couldn't be—real.

"I'll have an orange juice—ah—" he said.

"Meadows, sir," the man said with a polite smile.

"Meadows," Ralph repeated. It was a relief. Any other name for the valet would have made the dream seem too real. It was altogether too realistic as it was.

He had almost gone back to sleep when Meadows returned, carrying a tray upon which rested a washpan, an apparently new towel, a toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste.

Meadows set the tray on a table and pulled a collapsed bed table from some compartment under the mattress, opening it and setting it astraddle Ralph's reclining body so that it came to his chest.

He sat up as Meadows set the tray before him. He brushed his teeth, flavoring the refreshing toothpaste. Meadows produced a glass of cold water from somewhere for him to rinse his mouth.

The tray was whisked away. Almost immediately the valet returned with another tray that held a pitcher of orange juice in which gleaming ice cubes floated, and an empty glass. He set it before Ralph and poured orange juice into the glass. There was a linen napkin on the tray.

"I'll start your bath, sir," Meadows said. He crossed the large room noise-

lessly on the thick, rich rug, and opened a cream-colored door, revealing a gleaming tile bathroom. All except his posterior disappeared, and the sound of water running into a tub drifted out of the bathroom. Ralph drank a second glass of orange juice, smacking his lips loudly.

By the time Meadows returned to take the tray and bed table out of his way, and he climbed out of the soft bed and crossed to the bathroom, he was prepared for what the mirror revealed to him.

When he came out of the bathroom the bed was made and a complete outfit of expensive clothes was laid out in orderly array on the spread.

He felt a qualm of conscience as he put them on, but reminded himself that it was only a dream. Behind a large oriental painting on the wall was a set of mirrors like those in a clothing store where you can see how you look in back. He admired his new look in these mirrors waiting for Meadows to return. When he didn't, Ralph hesitantly opened a door. Meadows was preoccupied with setting a table with service for one. Ralph saw this and sighed his relief. He had been afraid he might have to talk to someone.

IN THE privacy of his—or rather, Frank Croft's—office an hour later, he relaxed and began to think things out. Meadows had wanted to call his car, but he had hurriedly declined. He didn't know how to drive. He had added that he would rather walk this morning, and that had satisfied the valet.

Frank Croft's office, he already knew, was in the same building where he worked. When he had taken the elevator after riding down town on the bus, using money from a well-

filled wallet in his pocket, he had nodded absently to Joe, the elevator man, who greeted him as Mr. Croft rather than ordering him to wait for the service elevator as he usually did.

He had looked around half-fearfully for himself—himself as janitor, wondering if Frank Croft were in his body, having the same experiences as himself.

"Where's Overhouse?" he asked Joe as the elevator stopped at his floor.

"Didn't show up this morning," Joe said.

"Fire him when he comes in," Ralph said.

"Y-yes sir!" Joe said, laughing nervously.

The girl at the desk where he usually paid his rent smiled warmly at him and greeted him as Mr. Croft. He nodded to her and walked boldly through the door lettered *Frank Croft*.

Now he sat at the ornate desk, his chair half turned so he could look out the windows at the city, thinking.

A homesickness crept over him. He recognized what was causing it. The novelty of his morning had kept him preoccupied, but now he knew that what he had missed most were his children around him at breakfast. He had missed Gretchen's cooking too, bad though it usually was. He was sort of used to it.

But of course it wasn't really morning at all. It was just that in the dream. In real life he was still in Mr. Blair's office and probably asleep, while Mr. Blair was finishing reading his legal papers.

The Main Building had certainly been real enough! By a little stretch of imagination he could almost believe it would be possible to go over to Blair's office and walk in. Would he see himself sitting there? Of course not! But he chuckled at the idea.

Then he sobered. If only it wasn't

a dream! If, by some strange quirk of fate, he were really Frank Croft for the moment, it would be a golden opportunity to straighten out a few things. Why not do it anyway? Then if it weren't a dream he wouldn't wish he had when he found out for sure.

He pressed a buzzer in the middle of the double row on the small board on his desk. A moment later a girl entered.

"I want all copies of the eviction file on Overhouse," he said. "If any exist outside this office, send for them and bring them in to me."

"The sheriff has a set," the girl said.

"Get them too," Ralph said.

She stared at him curiously, then turned and left the office. A few minutes later she returned with a file folder and laid it on his desk.

"I called," she said. "The rest will be over in half an hour."

Ralph fingered through the folder. He pocketed the two carbons of the eviction notice. The other stuff, mostly letters, he scanned idly.

When the girl brought in the original of the eviction papers he asked, "Is this all of it?"

"Yes," she said. He nodded without expression. She left silently.

He took the carbons out of his pocket and placed them with the original between his fingers. He started to tear them in two, then paused, frowning.

Putting them back in his breast pocket, he picked up the phone. "Get me Mr. Blair, the lawyer, on the phone," he said. A moment later when Mr. Blair's familiar voice sounded a cheery-hello, he said, "Mr. Blair? This is Frank Croft. If you'll be in your office I want to come over and talk with you—about the Overhouse eviction papers."

"WH-WH-WHY come right over,"

Vince said, taken completely by surprise. He heard the phone on the other end cut off. He remained frozen for an instant, his eyes wide. Then he jiggled the phone for his receptionist with shaking fingers. "Get me George Stevens. Hurry," he said.

"George!" he exploded when he heard his friend's voice. "Overman—I mean Overhouse—I mean Croft—what I mean is the real Overman, who is made up as Croft, just called me on the phone. He's coming over. I want you to be here."

"You sound excited," George's voice said lazily.

"You would be too," Vince snapped. "He calmly told me he was Croft and wanted to see me about the Overman—I mean Overhouse eviction papers."

"Has he torn them up?" George asked.

"I don't know," Vince said. "I rather think not—I don't know."

"You *are* excited," George laughed. "I'll be right down."

"It's no laughing matter," Vince said indignantly. "What if we lose track of which is which? What if Overhouse tears up those papers or does something else he shouldn't? When it all comes out I could be disbarred!" He banged the receiver on George's delighted laughter. Almost immediately it rang. He picked it up again.

"Ralph Overhouse is here to see you, Mr. Blair," the receptionist said efficiently.

"He couldn't be!" Vince said. "He hasn't had time to get here. Have him wait until I see George."

He dropped the phone in its cradle as though it were hot, and jumped out of his chair to pace the office floor nervously. Perhaps a full minute went by. Suddenly the door burst open and the figure of Ralph Over-

house came in. As Vince knew, it was Frank Croft, in reality; but he couldn't let him know that he knew.

"I thought I told my receptionist to have you wait, Mr. Overhouse," he said coldly.

"Certainly you did," Frank Croft said, "but just because he's—I'm poor is no reason why I should have to wait. What ~~are~~ you doing about that eviction?"

Vince had come to a dead stop in mid-stride. He looked at the figure of Overhouse, his scalp tingling strangely. He hadn't expected anything like this—that Croft would actually pretend to be Ralph Overhouse—or did Croft really believe he was?

"Sit down, Ralph," Vince said softly. He watched the overalled man come into the room further and take the seat the real Ralph Overhouse had sat in the previous day.

If he had not known, he would have sworn it was Ralph Overhouse in reality. Suddenly he guessed why Frank Croft might be playing the Overhouse role, completely. He would think that if he told anyone, "Look here, I'm really Frank Croft, the millionaire," they would think him crazy and have him locked up. Yes, that must be the reason, Vince's mind whispered with relief.

"How do you feel this morning, Ralph?" Vince asked cautiously. "Do you feel—yourself?"

"I feel fine, thank you," Croft-as-Overhouse said stiffly. "But I want to know what you've done about the eviction."

Vince stared at the man, then slowly relaxed.

"I'm expecting Frank Croft to arrive any minute now," he said. "Care to stay and talk with him—Ralph?"

He got a secret satisfaction out of watching the man's face turn pale and his hands tremble, and admired the

way he pulled himself together again right away.

"Maybe that would be a good idea," Croft-as-Overhouse said, nodding his head slowly. "We might be able to come to some sort of—*agreement*."

Vince turned quickly away to hide the delighted smile that forced its way to his lips. So Croft really believed his soul had been transferred into Overhouse's body! And he had drawn the "logical" conclusion that Overhouse's must be in his own! This was going to be good. Or was it? Why didn't George hurry?

THE PHONE jangled. Before Vince could pick it up the office door opened. Overhouse-as-Croft, a perfect duplicate of Croft as he had been yesterday, but with a different suit on, stood framed in the open doorway, his eyes fixed on the back of Croft-as-Overhouse. That man slowly turned to face the newcomer. His eyes grew large and round.

Both men were staring at each other. Their faces were pale. They had stopped breathing. Each saw in the other's eyes the "secret" they shared between them.

Ralph Overhouse, as Croft, had been saying to himself all the way over, "When I open that door I won't see myself sitting in that chair where I was when things changed. But if I do—" And his mind had balked at the possibility. And when he had opened the door, he had seen himself sitting there...

Frank Croft had held in his mind the conviction that no matter how real things seemed, sanity demanded that it be only a dream, and that if and only if he met himself and saw Overhouse's spirit looking out at him would he believe it real and not a dream. And that was exactly what had happened...

And Vince Blair, utterly hypnotized by the unearthly, gripping drama of the moment, stared from one man to the other, also not breathing.

It was into this example of still-life drama that George Stevens strode briskly, a wide smile on his lips, a bright gleam in his eye.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, his words falling on unhearing ears, "we're all together."

Neither Croft-as-Overhouse nor Overhouse-as-Croft caught the out-of-characteriness of the remark, because neither heard it. He saw that, and shrugged his shoulders. "Well, we might as well all have a drink," he added, going over to the liquor cabinet.

He felt a strong desire to slip some of the powder into three of the glasses, but resisted and put it in only two. With four drinks mixed, he placed doped ones in Overhouse's and Croft's unresisting fingers, gave the third one to Vince and smiled into his numbed eyes. Picking up the fourth, he turned to face the three.

"Down the hatch!" he said loudly.

Overhouse and Croft obeyed without seeming to be aware they were doing so. Vince started to, but after the first swallow seemed to become suspicious of his drink and stopped, setting the glass down.

Then both Vince and George watched breathlessly until Croft's and Overhouse's eyes grew blank.

"Now get Jerome over here," George ordered, going to the door and closing it. "Work fast. This dose will last only two hours."

HOW SHOULD we do it?" Vince asked, when Jerome's handiwork was finished, and the unconscious Overhouse and Croft were physically their old selves once more. "Should we have each of them come

to the way they were yesterday?"

"No," George said. "Definitely no. Then each would think it had been a dream. Place Croft standing inside the door the way Overhouse-as-Croft was, and Overhouse sitting in the chair the way Croft-as-Overhouse was. Then it will seem a sudden re-transfer of souls to them."

There were only brief minutes to spare. The whole thing would be spoiled if either of the men came to ahead of time. But it went off perfectly.

Vince waited until the first moment of readjustment had been completed. Then, pretending that so far as he was aware, nothing had happened, he picked up his unfinished drink.

"Come in and sit down, Mr. Croft," he said. "You said over the phone you wanted to see me about the Overhouse eviction."

"Uh—" Frank Croft jerked his eyes away from Ralph Overhouse. "Why yes, that's right. Uh—I've done a little thinking."

"The papers are in your breast pocket," Ralph Overhouse said unobtrusively.

"Uh—of course," Frank Croft said. A deep and knowing look passed between the two men that brought a muffled sputter of disguised laughter from George.

Frank Croft brought out the eviction papers and glanced through them, lifting his eyebrows.

"Is there any way we can come to an agreement so that Mr. Overhouse doesn't have to move?" Vince asked.

Frank Croft turned his eyes directly on Vince for the first time. They were suddenly cold and stubborn.

"No there isn't," he said. "They're to be out by tomorrow if I have to move them out by force."

Vince's mouth dropped open.

"Bu-bu-bu-bu—" he stammered.

Slowly Croft's stern look relaxed into a smile.

"You see," he said casually, "I have an eight-bedroom, three-bath apartment in my own building that's so expensive nobody can afford to rent it—so it stays vacant. It's furnished, too. I've decided the Overhouses might as well live in it."

He turned back to Ralph Overhouse, and, while they looked deeply into each other's eyes, he slowly and deliberately tore up the eviction papers and dropped them to the floor.

Vince and George, unnoticed by them, gave each other a similar—but not quite so soulfully deep—look of mutual understanding. And George formed a circle with thumb and forefinger of his right hand, and winked at Vince.

And the receptionist sitting at her desk outside the door was completely unaware of the two separate partnerships that had just been formed a few steps away, both, in their way, made in Heaven.

THE END

BEFORE THE CRO-MAGNON

IF IT IS possible to assign a quality of "humanness" to men, if it is possible to distinguish between men and animals, undoubtedly one of the most important differences would be found in features of the hand.

Man and the anthropoids have opposable thumbs.

It is known that the Neanderthal, the Cro-Magnon and the Heidelberg men had well-developed thumbs. But what about ancestors, the brutish half-men, half-beasts who were their progenitors? Most scientists have inclined to the belief that

these prehistoric men were unable to use tools and weapons because they did not have an opposable thumb. This has been guesswork however. A South African scientist now claims to have discovered fossil evidence demonstrating conclusively that these primitive peoples did possess that distinguishing mark, that they did have strongly opposable thumbs. These true "ape-men" were surprisingly closer to their followers than we've usually thought.

The thumb as described by the scientist is considerably thicker and blunter than modern man's.

—Ed Kelly

THE FINAL STALEMATE

By
CHARLES RECOUR

I FEEL mighty proud of my part in stopping the Third Martian-Terran Interplanetary war. I'm only a cog in our huge democratic machine but in no small measure I've contributed to the real and maybe—final—ending of all war.

You see, I'm Clark, owner of Gordon Robotronics, and my factory has produced almost forty-five per-cent of all the robots used in the war.

Perhaps I'd better start at the beginning. In both of the previous Martian-Terran fracas, men have manned the spaceships and fought the dreadful wars of attrition which cost so dearly in lives, progress, and material wealth.

Up until the beginning of the Third War I had a fair sized business producing domestic robots for factory and industrial work. But when the war broke, with the use of such new and superfast weapons, the government found that men simply couldn't handle the job. I and my cohorts produced robots who could—and who could think—within reason. I don't mean that as a joke either. But you have to build robots with a control in 'em—everybody knows that, that is, if you want to still remain on top. Consequently our war robots had built into them, the First Law, "Under no conditions must humans be harmed!" And there's no way to distinguish a Martian from a Terran with the result

that our war robots will do anything but kill Martians!

The Martian government of course grabbed our Martian factories and set to work expanding them, doing the same as we here on Terra had done.

But they had to insert the First Law too—there simply isn't any other way to use robots, as the Robotic Insurrection of '83 shows.

So what's the general result? Both Terra and Mars have the biggest most powerful forces of destruction imaginable, huge space ships, vast fleets, ghastly weapons of death, incredibly powerful atomic bombs—all "manned" by robots—and officered by a few humans in Prime Fortresses.

But none of the robots can, by their inherent, human-induced natures, dare to raise offensive action against human beings. Well, it's no news the way the preposterous situation was finally resolved and everyone brought to terms, sensible humane, considerate and reasonable terms, which seem to me, to outlaw war forever!

The ironic part of the whole thing is that probably nothing in the whole Solar System could be conceivably more dangerous than a robot built without a First Law. Don't worry though, no one will ever try *that*—the Robotic Insurrection is still too close for comfort...

THE STEAMING AUTO WORLD

By
RALPH ORTIZ

THIS MAGAZINE has received a gratifying large number of inquiries for further information on steam automobiles ever since it published a number of articles on the subject. Most of the questioners were interested in obtaining information on where steam cars could be obtained or what organizations were available which they could join to indulge in this "hobby".

It might be wise to clarify this situation. The steam-powered automobile is still a curiosity here. When the "Stanley Steamer" gave up the ghost during the first World War, the ordinary gas-engined car took over with a vengeance.

But there are always die-hards. And visionaries!

The internal combustion engine is the one which has been most widely developed, probably because of the cheapness and simplicity of the fuel, gasoline.

But the steam-powered car has a place. It is a smoother, simpler machine. But our transportation system hasn't used it to any extent. As a result its technological progress has been little. But with the theoretical knowledge we have now, it shouldn't be hard to design a superb steam powered automobile.

As we pointed out before, a number of avid experimenters have done just that. They've built their own automobiles, using usually a stock car with the gas engine removed. And they've had great success.

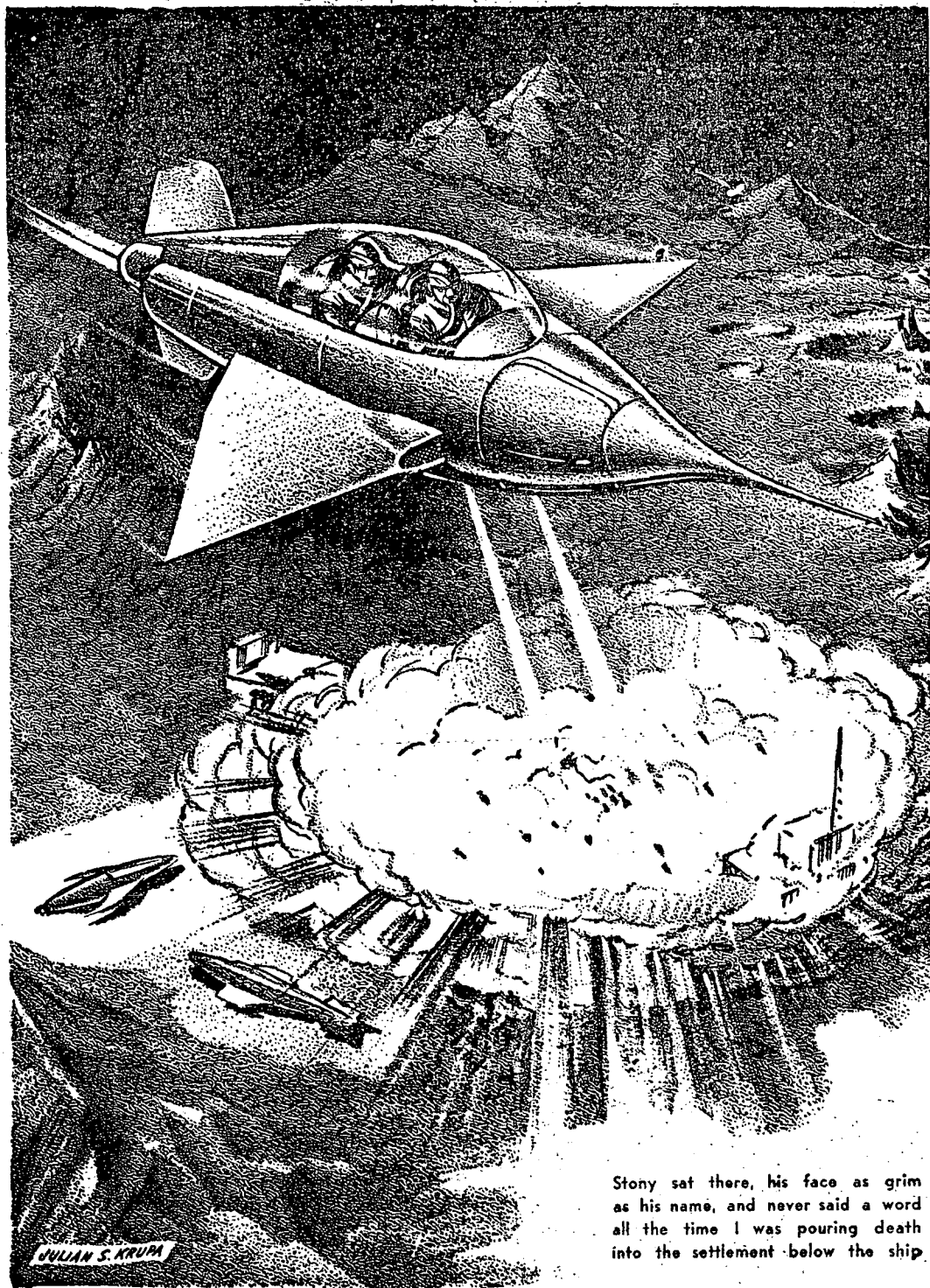
But unfortunately or fortunately, we won't see any great influx of steam-engined cars until there is a tremendous oil shortage. This doesn't seem likely because there is so much coal and oil can be made from coal.

Furthermore, we are on the threshold of important new discoveries in atomic physics and in electricity which would seem to make the need for using the power of expanding steam unnecessary.

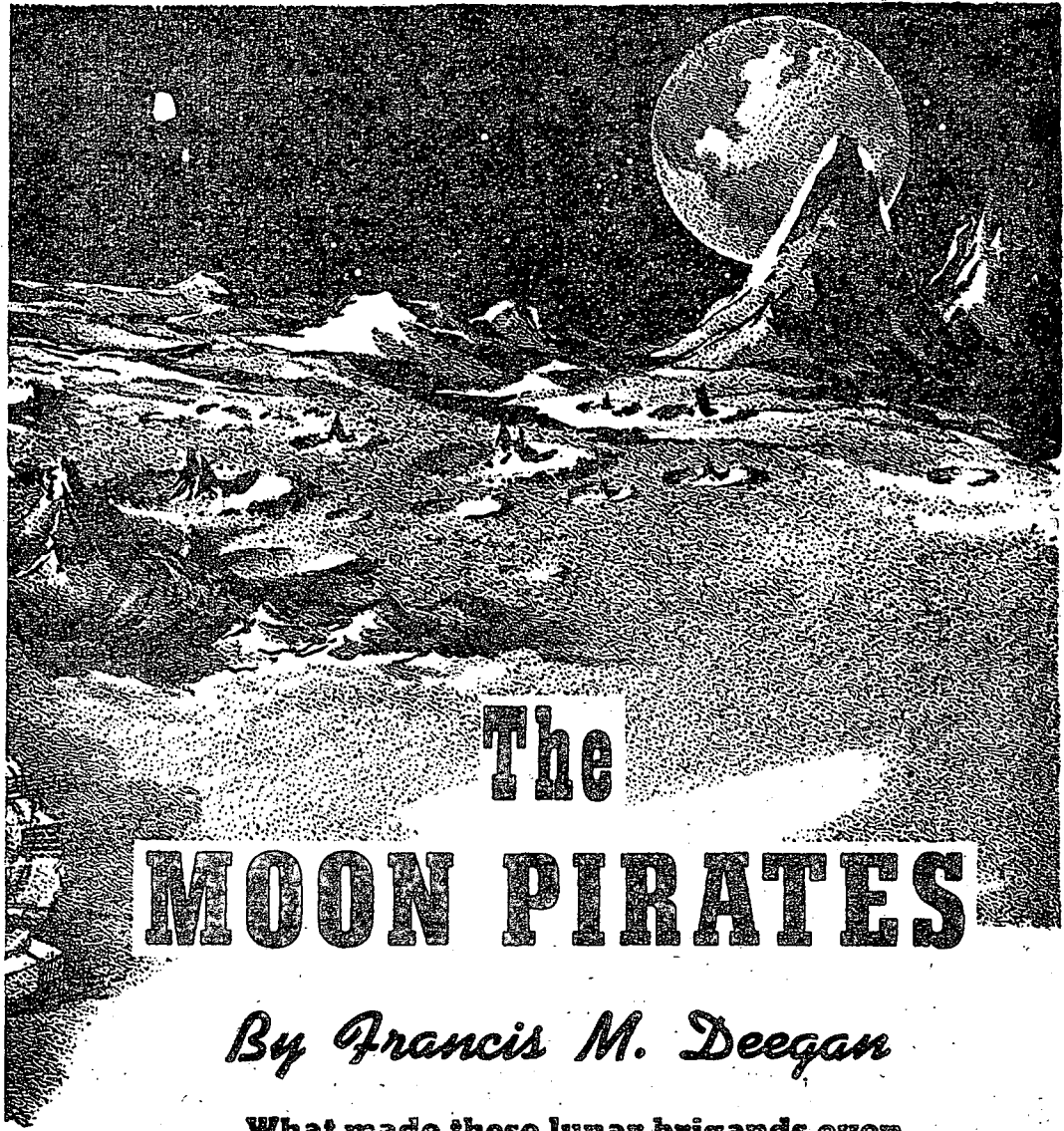
To sum it up, working with steam cars does not seem to be justified from any standpoint except that of the hobbyist. Unless there is a sufficiently strong economic reason for making a technological development of a known invention, that development is usually not made.

So I think we can shed a tear for the age of the steam car, admire it from afar, even regard it wistfully, but let's stick to the more promising possibilities of the gas turbine, and God knows what else...

THE END



Stony sat there, his face as grim
as his name, and never said a word
all the time I was pouring death
into the settlement below the ship.



The MOON PIRATES

By Francis M. Deegan

What made these lunar brigands even tougher to deal with was their ability to use weapons of lovely feminine flesh!

THE CONVEYOR belt moved noiselessly past the table with several appetizing trays, and that tantalizing hunger for real food started gnawing at my stomach. I wanted to reach out and grab a hot bovar steak, or a venduck with its three legs sticking up conveniently. The next tray came along, slow but sure, and the shuttle arms clicked

and lifted the tray off the belt and held it suspended over our table. I looked at the mess and then I looked at Major Dunbar.

"You're a nice guy, Doc," I said, "And I like you. But I think you're overdoing this diet formula. If I eat much more of this baby food, I'm going to start cutting a new set of teeth."

"The way you're acting we may have to measure you for diapers, too," Doc came back. "You don't hear Ben griping all the time."

"We'll take it and like it," Ben said manfully, and started lifting the dishes off the tray.

He was a liar. He liked it even less than I did, but he confined his critical comments to off-duty periods. And then he really cut loose. To hear him tell it, everything about the project was being handled wrong by the world's prize collection of nitwits. It made me sore. I wanted to slug him with my bare fist. Slugging was practically a lost art. But I knew how to do it.

Captain Ben Crane was my superior, but that wasn't what kept me from hitting him. It was Stella. Stella Crane. Even her name did things to me. Visions... a smooth, round arm lifting like slow music. She touched a rose and I felt her fingers on my heart. She turned her head and the satin blond hair stroked her shoulder. She smiled her slow, intimate smile and I plunged into the cool blue depths of her eyes. She was... Oh, hell. I was crazy about her. So I didn't hit Ben. I let him talk when we were off-duty. And I let him play the part of an earnest and up-right young officer when we were on base. He did it so well that nobody questioned his selection as chief operator for the secret Jet Javelin.

Everybody, including the mechanics, questioned my fitness as his

co-op. Everybody but Stoneface—Colonel Fay Stone, that is. He knew me, he deplored my lack of discipline, but I had stood by him when he was being criticized for trying to promote the Jet Javelin, and got himself demoted instead. We got transferred to a space trainer together. And we were still together, at his request, when he was recalled after the World Monitors changed their minds about the usefulness of the JJ. He had assembled a small, tight outfit there at the isolated desert base, and he had complete control of the JJ-1 project. It was the only way he would work and the Monitors let him have it his way, because the JJ was his baby and it was the only hope of combating the space pirates.

"Your hunger is merely psychological, Steve." Doc Dunbar looked at me sympathetically and sipped his glass of B-water. That was something else the medico-chemists had cooked up. It was colorless and tasteless, but it was supposed to oil the brain cells. "Those imported delicacies from Venus and elsewhere are much too rich for earthly digestion. If you were required to eat nothing else you would very quickly tire of it, and want to go back to a simple diet."

"Not this simple," I growled, spooning up the green mush. "I can't see how one little brown venduck would affect my fitness as a JJ co-op long after it was digested. We're not scheduled for a test tomorrow."

THE BUZZER sounded and the speaker came to life: "Captain Ben Crane and Lieutenant Steve Burns report to the CO in thirty minutes at 1300. Repeat. Captain Ben Crane and Lieutenant Steve Burns report to the CO..."

Ben grinned at me. "We're scheduled now, son. I think this is it!"

I agreed with him, but I didn't say

anything. I was thinking of Stella. If this was the big one, the final test, I had things to say to her. I hoped brother Ben would leave us alone long enough to get them said right.

Stoneface had Colonel Braymore with him when we reported. Braymore was the official observer for the Board of Monitors. He was a lean, saturnine, suspicious-eyed bird and I often wondered what joy he got out of life. He roosted over the project like a brooding vulture, ready to pounce on the slightest irregularity. All outgoing communications had to pass through his claws, which is as good as saying that we were completely cut off from the rest of the world. Nobody wanted to be put through his relentless third degree solely for the sake of sending Aunt Minnie birthday greetings. Incoming messages were discouraged by the same treatment.

His eyes passed over Ben's correctly buttoned uniform and fixed on me with the look of a dyspeptic bird of prey about to devour a particularly obnoxious tid-bit. He didn't have to say anything, he just looked.

"Tomorrow morning," Stoneface said, without any preliminaries, and paused to study each of us in turn. He was thirty-eight, but his face was ageless, chiseled out of hard rock in clean, sharp lines. No amount of abuse could destroy him, it only fined him down, eliminating all the human weaknesses that most men are burdened with. His gray eyes were calm and his deep voice was casual; but for him, more than for any of us, this was the big one. This was vindication and triumph, the final proof that space fighters could take off directly from earth, pass through all atmospheric barriers, and navigate the Vac with unlimited range. "You will report at Take-off Pit 2 at 0400," he continued quietly,

"prepared for the final test."

"That means fully prepared," Braymore said thinly. "You are both near the top of your emotional cycle, your physical charts check close to atmo-vac requirements as of this morning. See that nothing disturbs your mental, physical or emotional graph between now and TO time." He slanted those beady eyes at me, and I knew what he was thinking. Stella. She could throw any man's graph into a zig-zag dive.

"You are both well aware of the rigid requirements," Stoneface remarked, taking some of the pressure of suspicion off me, and getting it back to an impersonal basis. He knew well enough that Braymore's accusing manner was the best way not to handle me. "Another space liner has been attacked. They managed to escape the magnetic drag, but there was considerable damage, and casualties. The sooner we can get the JJ certified for production the better. Next the pirates will be attacking liners and freighters anchored in the gravitational fields. Much depends upon you two men and the JJ-1 tomorrow morning. Any questions?"

"The course, sir," Ben said. "Has that been—"

"Not determined yet," Stoneface told him. "Traffic has been somewhat disrupted due to the latest attack. The charts will be corrected up to TO time. Reports are being assembled in the chart room now. Course will be plotted at the last possible moment."

"Thank you sir." Ben nodded and frowned earnestly. He was as handsome as his sister was beautiful. A blond young hero. He should have been an actor. He was an actor. On the tele-screen he'd look good in one of those historical romances from the twelfth century. Those

were the good old days. Wild and free...

I SOMETIMES felt as if I had been born too late, by about two hundred years. I'd like to have lived during those experimental days, when men were just beginning to dream about the possibilities of astro-navigation. That's why the JJ appealed to me so strongly. It went all the way back to some of the original theories, most of which had been scrapped when the G-anchor proved to be practical. Long before the big, spherical liners were towed to their assigned gravitation anchorage from which it was possible to spin off into the Vac, men had tried to launch space ships directly from the earth. Of course it was much simpler and safer to use the atmospheric navigators as ferries to the big space liners since the principles of atmospheric and space navigation were directly opposed, and a combination atmo-vac navigator was considered impractical, and downright silly. So Stoneface and I, we were silly, until the pirates were successful in establishing a base on the moon, and raiding the undefended astro-traffic....

"Lieutenant!" Colonel Braymore snapped. "Have *you* any questions?"

I came back to earth with a thump, and realized I had been standing there like a dreamy Martian bovar just before the hunter bounced a club off his flat skull. I met Colonel Stone's calm gray eyes and our glance held like a secret understanding as I said: "No questions, sir. None at all."

There were private cottages scattered around the base for members of the personnel who had families. They were fully insulated, and they also had safe-wells underneath with automatic drops. The base had formerly been used as an experimental

station for resistor rays, and at the warning the cottage dwellers dropped into the safe-well and stayed there until they got the clear light to come out again. It was an accident which gave the pirates the idea of using resistor rays as space weapons. An astro-freighter drifted off course and into the aura of an express liner, the liner used its resistors full force in the effort to avoid the foreign object, but instead of changing its own course, the liner blasted the freighter out of its aura and sent it drifting helplessly through space. It never was found, but subsequent investigation proved that the full charge of resistor rays had cancelled its electromag power, and the liner could have used its magnetic drag to bring in the neutralized freighter, if they had acted in time.

The identity of the pirates was still a mystery, but it was known that they had jammed the passenger list of a Mars liner, and had taken over ten hours ATO (after take-off). Obviously they had carried equipment and technicians to set up their base on the moon, which was another project abandoned by the World Monitors as an unnecessary expense. They were unanimously determined to do everything the hard way, because it made them more important. But that was all right with me. What I wanted most—next to Stella, of course—was to take a crack at that moon base in an armed JJ. My chances looked good—with the JJ, that is. With Stella, I couldn't be sure.

SHE GREETED us that evening in a primitive South Seas setting. I knew she had done it for me. Ben looked the part of a glamorous hero, but he was about as romantic as a robot. He didn't care where he was as long as he got what he wanted. Moonlight and music had no effect

on his cold, practical self-interest.

"Do we have to have that?" he inquired as we stepped into the languorous atmosphere projected from the tele-screen. Palm trees swayed in a flowery breeze, soft voices sang a native chant above the lazy sound of surf, and the smell of a tropic sea mingled with the island perfume. Stella was like a rare lily in a molded flame satin sheath.

She swayed near and lifted her cheek for my kiss and let her hand slip down inside my arm, pressing against me. "Yes, dear, we do," she answered him sweetly. "It is exactly right."

Ben threw me a glance of amused tolerance, as if he were indulging a pet moron. "Well, come in, son," he grinned, "and get the big news."

He threw himself down in a cushioned recliner and lifted the tall, slim tube glass placed there conveniently. It was clear liquid, but it was not B-water. It was the forbidden Lespe, distilled from wild Martian clover bushes, and dangerously stimulating.

The soft native voices swelled with sensual yearning, and Stella led me to a low divan. She leaned back dreamily, and I watched that soft smile warming her lips and eyes. It was lovely. But it was still not enough. I wanted something definite. I wanted to get rid of Ben.

"The news," I said. "What could that be?"

"Can't you guess?" Ben grinned at me. "Why, son! After tomorrow you're a free man!"

I still didn't get it. Stella... I was full of her. So near and yet so far. An unspoken promise, maddening and irresistible. A warm, sweet smell. The stir of her breathing. The tingling touch of her fingers in my palm. Free? I didn't want to be free of this...

"No more dumb regulations," Ben was saying. "After tomorrow, we make our own rules. Sweet Jupiter! We can have the world!"

"Ben! Put that sipper down—"

"Oh, love, you're so sweet!" Stella laughed softly and kissed my ear. "It isn't what he's sipping. He's immune to that stuff. Don't you understand?"

Something cold hit me in the stomach. I understood. Too suddenly. The sick anger was all for myself. I should have known. I should have thought of this. I knew Ben was wrong. Instead of blinding myself to the fact, I should have faced it, and admitted the possibility that he was all the way wrong—a traitor. A good old-fashioned traitor right out of a Twentieth-Century melodrama. I sat there in the exotic South Sea island moonlight, while the sad, love-sick voices chanted a phrase over and over.

"Well, ray me ragged!" I said, too loudly, and reached for one of the pencil slim sippers on the server attached to the divan. I sucked a few drops of the fiery sweet liquid and felt it lifting the crown of my head with sudden acceleration. The plaintive voices came clearer, the subdued roar of the ocean was closer, and the breeze laden with flower and salt sea odors was stronger. Everything became more distinct as my senses responded to the quick stimulus, and my brain leaped to encompass the full meaning of this treachery. Ben might be immune to the first shot of Lespe from constant use, but I knew that I was not.

"Well, ray me ripe!" I said more softly. "You might have told me sooner. This comes as a big surprise!"

"Why should it?" Ben said harshly. "You've known all along that I felt the same way you did about

these careful Carries handling the project. If I could have had my way, we'd have had the JJ in production by this time—on the moon, that is."

"Equipment?" I said. "Parts? Technicians?"

"We have the best. And what we don't have, we'll soon get. All we need is a working model."

"So the JJ-1 finishes the test run on the moon, instead of coming back to base."

"Perfect, isn't it?" Ben grinned. "Colonel Stone's pretty little Javelin vanishes. The test is never completed. All the wiseheads will yell: 'I told you so!' And Stoneface has it all to do over again. If they give him a second chance. Which I doubt. And meantime we turn out the JJ—enough for a small fleet. If the Board of Numbskulls ever does get around to production, it will be too late."

I TOOK ANOTHER sip of Lespe. The girls were dancing now. The native girls. They moved around the circular wall of the room in a dreamy sensuous rhythm to the throbbing of drums.

"And where," I asked Stella, "will you be?"

"I'll be all right." She took my face in her soft hands and gave me that full, deep look of promise. "I'll grieve for you and Ben, for a while. And then I'll take passage on a liner. One that has been marked for capture. We'll be together again soon."

"Not soon enough. We've got to be married now, tonight."

"Slow down, Steve," Ben drawled. "Now you're sipping the dream stuff."

"Am I? Did any of your wiseheads think to provide a chaplain on that moon base?"

"Ray me!" Ben looked startled. "I don't know. But the authorities can

give you a marriage contract, the same as on any other astro-base. You don't have to have a chaplain."

"I do. And anyway this is between Stella and me. Suppose you keep out of it."

"Stella." Ben appealed to his sister as one adult to another. "Talk to the boy. Tell him why you can't—"

"I don't see why not," she murmured. "Why shouldn't we be married by the chaplain tonight, if that's what he wants? I'm perfectly willing."

"Good girl!" Ben flashed his sister a glance of cold admiration.

Her sudden surrender was almost too much for me, after being put off for months, but the Lespe acceleration had speeded up my faculties so that I got Ben's real meaning. It spoiled the moment, and fogged any happiness I might have felt. He was applauding his sister for being willing to go the limit to keep me in line. And he was willing to let her do just that. The fact that we might be in love with each other didn't enter into his calculations. He had dragged Stella into his treacherous plot in order to nail me. He had made her a co-conspirator, but he had not trusted me with the dangerous knowledge until the last-minute. I knew then how much I hated Ben.

The chaplain came to the cottage with an assistant. There had been no difficulty about persuading him. He made no mention of the final JJ-1 test, but of course he knew. He was competent and understanding. He gave us his blessing and departed.

Ben was sure of me then. He left us alone. The circular room was blank and utterly still. The dancing girls had been banished while the ceremony took place. Stella lifted a white arm to turn them on again, but I stopped her. I didn't need any synthetic atmosphere, not with Stella in

my arms. In spite of Ben, in spite of what I had to do, this one night was mine....

BEN WAS so sure of me that not even Stella's wild crying could wake him when I was preparing to leave.

"Go and get him," I said, and waited while she ran frantically to his room. She came running straight back to me, and huddled against me sobbing like any frightened wife. Ben followed, looking tidy and neat in his venusheen robe, but his eyes were stormy with rage.

"You ignorant, uncultured fool!" He strode into the room and stood there like an outraged prince. "I let you marry my sister, and now, because she does not please your crude Twentieth-Century taste, you want to wreck everything in your childish vengeance!"

"Shut up, you cold-blooded egocentric! You've got it all wrong. I love Stella too much to let her be sacrificed to your criminal ambition. Let's get this straight right now. I never intended to fall in with your plan to steal the JJ-1. I married Stella to protect her. She's mine now, and you have nothing to say about her."

"Use your brain, you idiot! Do you think you can interfere at this point without implicating yourself? Stella is your wife now, but she has been in on it from the beginning. It will be the death penalty for all three of us. You can't—"

"I think I can." I put Stella aside and started toward him. "But before I go, there's one thing I've wanted to do for a long time."

I was wary: I thought he might have a stunner. He had one all right, in the pocket of his robe; but I hadn't studied Twentieth-Century customs for nothing. Hand-to-hand fighting was not practiced any more except

as a sport, along with steel-sword fencing, lead-bullet shooting, and fiber-rope catching which was formerly used on wild cattle. All of these sports were extremely difficult, and therefore not generally practiced. Ben lifted the small, gray rectangular stunner swiftly enough, but he was unprepared for my head-butting lunge. I heard the dull "spud" as the weapon discharged, but I was well under it, driving him backward. He made an odd whooshing sound as he landed on the thick carpet. The stunner flew out of his hand and I got off him, pulled him halfway up by the front of his robe, and socked him hard.

It was quite an experience. His face didn't feel anything like the dummy I had been practicing on. It was harder, but much more satisfactory to hit; it had a live feel. One punch and he was dead out. I was sorry he went out so quick. I'd liked to have hit him again, but I didn't think I'd better. With his head full of Lespe fumes it might kill him cold. Not that I'd mind killing him, but I would have to have an awfully good explanation for it. And that I was not prepared to give, not with Stella involved.

I turned around and groaned. She was crumpled in a little heap. The stunner had got her instead of me, and she would be one sick girl when she came out of the shock. I called myself worse things than Ben had ever thought of. I should have got her clear out of the way before I tackled him. I still had a lot to learn about the Twentieth-Century. I carried her into her room, and put her to bed. I hated to leave her, but it was getting on toward morning. There wasn't much time.

I was unnerved. I was not myself. Just the memory of Stella lying there like a flower that had been stepped on was enough to fog me. Crossing the

flat spread of the base at that hour was spooky. Everything was still and black. There were guards to protect the base from visitors, but they were certainly not expecting any of the personnel to be prowling in the dark. Everybody locked on the base came and went freely during the daylight; there was no reason to sneak around at night. Or rather, there hadn't been any reason until now.

I MANAGED to get down into the pit and climb up to the control cab of the JJ-1. It was open, but the gangway from the top of the pit to the floor of the cab had been removed. Inside I went to work on the dial faces. They were about the only parts that couldn't be replaced in a hurry. They were jewelled for accuracy and had to be specially made by hand for the JJ-1.

I wanted to delay that final test. I hadn't thought very far ahead. I hadn't had time. But if the JJ-1 couldn't go, that would give me time. I couldn't risk Stella's life by reporting Ben. The Board had decreed the death penalty for the pirates. Besides I had no proof, and without it, I would probably eliminate myself instead of Ben. But now that I had Stella, I was sure I could get the proof, and present it in such a way that she could not be held accountable for whatever her brother had forced her to do to promote his treacherous plans.

The chill that struck me was sudden and paralyzing. What had I done! I had left Stella, stunned and helpless, in that house with Ben. Clever, crooked, cold-blooded Ben Crane would recover from that blow on the head and realize just what I hoped to do. He had been willing to risk his sister's life all along, even to leave her behind when he stole the JJ-1, with only the slim hope of getting

away on a liner marked for attack. He would not hesitate to—

Cold perspiration was oozing out on my face and my hands shook so that the small hand tool rattled against the control board. I had to go back. Get Stella out of there...

The gangway slid gently into the cab, and somebody came across with a firm tread.

"Lieutenant Burns!" Colonel Braymore rasped. He held a weapon, but it was not a stunner. It was a deadly, long-barrelled Monitor, issued only to members of the official police for the Board of Monitors.

I had two of the dial faces in my pocket and a third partly loosened. Braymore had two of the guards with him. He asked them to note the circumstances. They did, and then we all went back across the gangway. I didn't feel anything at all. There was nothing to feel, nothing to do. This was it. I had been caught red-handed.

Stoneface came into his office fully dressed. There was no surprise, no anger showing in his quiet face. He was remote, and somehow inhuman, in the face of this last-minute catastrophe. He listened calmly to Braymore's recital and charges.

Braymore said one of the guards had reported a prowler near the Number 2 pit. He had gone at once and apprehended Lieutenant Steve Burns in the act of dismantling the control board. The conclusion was obvious. Lieutenant Burns was infatuated with Stella Crane; he had married her hastily when he was informed the final test was scheduled, and he had thereupon lost his nerve. Rather than leave his bride to risk his life in the JJ-1, he had chosen to disable the draft.

"I must remind you, Colonel," Braymore said thinly, "that I have previously called your attention to the general unfitness of this man. It has been obvious to everyone that he was

not qualified for the rigid discipline and high moral standard required for this operation."

"Does he admit the charges?" Stoneface inquired coldly.

Colonel Braymore waited, letting the silence pile up until the weight of it was almost unbearable. I didn't say anything. I let him wait.

"He cannot deny it," Braymore said at last. "He was caught in the act. The two guards will bear witness to the fact that two of the dial faces were in his pocket, and he was working on a third."

One of the guards put the two jewelled dials on the desk and laid the hand tool carefully beside them.

"Lieutenant?" Stoneface addressed me for the first time.

I TRIED to reach him with that special look we had. That understanding look which we had exchanged many times before under adverse conditions. It didn't take. There was no contact. Stoneface had closed the connection.

"I want an answer," he said. "You had a reason for this act. What was it?"

"I had a reason," I mumbled. "I must have forgotten what it was."

What could I say? What could I do? Stella... if her own brother didn't murder her, Colonel Braymore would put his claws on her, tear her out of my grasp and send her to a traitor's death. My fists clenched with sudden, uncontrollable hatred for Braymore. I wanted to attack him with my bare hands. I glared at him and met his beady-eyed stare of watchfulness. For the first time, I noticed that he still held the deadly Monitor on me. One flick of his finger and I could be burned to a cinder. The fellow was uncanny. It was almost as if he could read my mind. The way he had caught me, and still watched me.

I was put in detention in one of the unused cottages. One guard was inside with me, and the other was stationed outside. Nobody could get in. Nobody could get out. That's what they thought.

The guard inside with me was well regulated. He was the guard type. He had learned what he needed to know, and practiced it faithfully. He was almost as big as me, a little older, and just as ugly in a rugged way, except that his ruggedness was disciplined, regulated. There was nothing individual about him. He would react according to regulations.

"Which one of you men saw me near the Number 2 pit?" I asked.

"Neither one of us. We were off duty when the Colonel called us."

"Had Colonel Braymore arranged to have you guards report direct to him instead of raising an alarm?"

He thought about this for a while. He decided he didn't like it. "Sorry, Lieutenant. I wouldn't know about that," he said, according to regulations.

We were standing in the circular central room of the cottage. It was quite bare, no soft carpeting or furniture.

"I don't believe I like this place," I said. "No comforts. I don't think I'll stay here. I think I'll leave."

I started toward him and he lifted his stunner. He was astonished and alarmed. He was quite sure that I was crazy.

"Lieutenant, stop!" he barked. "I'll have to use this—"

I squatted and lunged. The stunner discharged with a dull "spud." He went back and down in a dead fall that jarred both of us. But I knew what was happening and he didn't. The smooth rectangular stunner had bounced out of his hand. I knew now why those old-fashioned hand guns

were made with clumsy handle grips, so that the combatants could hang onto them in any rough and tumble action. I climbed off him and pulled him to his feet. He swayed there, panting and wild-eyed, flapping his arms in an ineffectual attempt to grab me. I stepped in and slugged him on the side of the head. I meant to slug him again from the other side, but he went down too fast, both arms still extended limply forward. His head bounced on the smooth plastic floor, and he was completely flattened.

I picked up the stunner and ran to the door. The second guard was just outside. He made a snappy regulation about-face, and I let him have the full blast of the stunner. He crumpled in a boneless heap.

THE FLOOD lights were on, and much as I wanted to get back to the Crane cottage, I knew it was useless to try now. If Ben had not already acted, Stella would be safe for a little while, with Stoneface on the job. Ben would be too busy answering questions to promote any sidelines like murder.

I went back inside and removed the guard's overall uniform, whistle signal, and other paraphernalia. He was still dead out. My fist was as good as a stunner any day. Better, for my purposes. This guard would certainly revive long before his stunned partner outside. I wanted everybody to know I had escaped as soon as possible.

I bundled up his equipment and took it to the cubicle where the safe-well was installed. The signals from the control center were off, but the automatic drop worked on house current. I lifted the round metal seal, stepped on the circular drop, pulled up the handle, and descended in a hurry. I heard the metal seal close and clamp over me. I stepped off the plat-

form and it went back up and clicked into place. The air down there was none too good, and then I realized the circulator must have been cut off with the signals. I wondered if I could hold out for thirty minutes. I wondered what kind of lies Ben was telling. I wondered who his accomplices were among the personnel on the base.

I wondered about everybody and everything—except Stella. I closed her off in a special compartment in my brain, not daring even to think about her. Not yet, not yet!

I fixed on my next strongest thought impulse. On my hatred for Ben and Colonel Braymore. Odd how they were linked in my angry brain. It came to me, stronger than ever, that there was something queer about Colonel Braymore's prompt appearance. It also occurred to me that Ben and Braymore were the only two men on the base who had not been personally selected by Stoneface. These two had been appointed by the Defense Committee of the Board of Monitors. If they were both members of the pirate gang, they wouldn't need any other accomplices.

I knew now that all my griping and chafing—at restraint—had probably saved my life. If Ben hadn't been satisfied with me, I'd have had a bad accident long ago. The Defense Committee had six other men in training at another base as replacements in case anything happened to Ben or me. Ben could keep on trying until he got the one he wanted. He thought I was the one, until I socked him. It wouldn't have been hard for Ben to figure out where I had gone then. Disabling the JJ-1 was the one sure way to hold up the test, if I did not report Ben's treachery. And Ben could have notified Braymore, which would explain his prompt arrival at the right place with two guards as witnesses...

When I came out of the safe-well

and left the cottage I had a good deal more respect for regulations than I had ever had before. They were so sure and predictable. In thirty minutes everything had apparently worked out as I expected. The guard woke up, reported my escape, and now they were out baying the night and throwing a regulation double guard around the base to prevent my unauthorized exit. And Colonel Braymore would be in charge. He would be very, very busy. Also very mad at himself for not burning me down when he had the chance, instead of playing it the smart way. It was smart to figure that I could not do any harm even if I tried to accuse Ben, once I had been caught tampering with the JJ-1, and thereby discredited.

I walked purposefully toward the Administration building, fully disguised in the guard's helmet and night goggles and overall uniform. A harassed clerk told me the CO was out. I nodded as if I had business there any way, and went into the office and closed the door. I removed the disguise, wadded it up and stuck it in the wardrobe locker, then wedged myself in and pulled the door shut. I didn't have to wait long. The office door opened and Stoneface said: "How long ago?"

I DIDN'T get the answer from outside, but Stoneface said: "All right. I'm here now, but don't send anyone in without announcing them."

He closed the door firmly and there was a little silence. I held my breath.

"Come out of there," he said.

I stumbled over my big feet, and mumbled: "It's me—sir."

"So I see." He didn't even have a stunner in his hand. He just stood there looking at me. I'll never forget him, standing there calmly, as if crummy lieutenants popped out of the

office furniture at all hours.

"Is my wife—alive?"

"Apparently. She is in the care of a nurse."

"Thank you—sir!" I couldn't get my breath. Stella was safe!

"Major Dunbar is more concerned about her brother. What did you do to him?"

"I hit him."

"With what?"

"My fist." I doubled it up and showed it to him. "I've been practicing. Like the Twentieth-Century sluggers. It works fine."

"You want to be careful with that thing. You gave Captain Crane a bad concussion. I haven't had a report on the guard yet. How long do you think you can keep this up?"

That's the way he was. Standing there talking calmly and matter-of-factly, as if we were discussing the weather. It got you. It was enough to break your heart.

"I didn't fluke out on you, Stoney."

"No?"

"No." I shook my head like a kid that got all choked up. And then all at once I was mad because we had to go through this painful scene. "That fellow Braymore!" I blurted.

"Colonel Braymore."

"I don't trust him. I think he sold out to the pirates!"

"Facts?"

"Not yet, but I think we can get them. If we—" I stared at him. "You don't seem to be surprised!"

"Nothing surprises me." There was an unexpected tinge of weariness in his tone. He walked slowly around his desk and sat down. "I assume you came here for a purpose. The most logical purpose would be to offer me some kind of explanation. Evidently it is hard to begin, so you lead up to it with a wild accusation of Colonel Braymore. Captain Crane says you

took Lespe last night, and then insisted upon marrying his sister at once. Later you woke him. He says you were abusing your wife, and when he appeared you attacked him. The general opinion is that you cracked under the strain of that final test."

"You can't believe that, Stoney! You know how I feel about the JJ-1. It means almost as much to me as it does to you. What I was doing, I was trying to make sure the JJ-1 couldn't take off this morning. I think she was headed for trouble. And all I want is a chance to prove it."

"The JJ-1 can still take off." He glanced at his chrono. "On schedule."

"No, it can't—I thought you said Ben was suffering from a bad concussion!"

"That's right."

"Then who's your chief operator?"

"You."

"You still need a co-op."

"That will be me."

"Oh, I get it. You were just trying me out. You wanted to see if I'd shoot my crown if I had to make that final test run anyway."

"Think you could do it?"

"With you? Any time. Any time at all."

HE PICKED up the speaker and started giving orders, which included a hurry-up call for Doc Dunbar. He glanced up at me, and that look flashed contact. The connection was open. The old combo was back in action. Me and Stoney—against the world, against the moon and the stars, too...

"Great Jupiter!" Doc Dunbar exploded. "This is insane—you're all insane! Neither one of you is in condition. I can't give my approval—"

"I didn't ask for your approval, Major," Stoneface said. "All I want is a clinical report for the record, and

the proper shots of Hyper-Z. The time is now. Let's have them."

We got the shots and there was an uproar outside. Braymore burst into the room, his trusty little Monitor in his fist. His bird face was congested, almost purple with fury.

"Colonel Stone! What does this mean? Why is the JJ-1 being readied for take-off?"

"Because she is going to take off, Colonel. On schedule."

"Oh, no! I won't allow it. I'll get authority from the Board to—" His rage cleared enough for him to see me. "You!" he howled, and jerked up the Monitor, trying to steady it.

"Safe down!" I yelled the regulation warning and lunged.

The searing blast roared out of the Monitor. I was a little short of the mark, but I managed to grab his thin knees and throw him. I got up fast and kicked the Monitor out of his fist. The room was blue with scorching smoke. Both Doc and Stoney were down flat. Braymore was thrashing his legs to get up. I reached for his throat and hauled him to his feet. I hit him. Not too hard this time. He went back against the desk, making strangled noises. I hit him again. And again. And then I let him have one final walloper. Something cracked. I think it was his jaw. He flopped backward and lay on the desk, and then slid off loosely and slapped his face on the floor.

"Great God!" Doc Dunbar gasped. He crawled to his knees and got up slowly. "That's murder!"

Stoney got up and came around his desk to look at Braymore. He picked up the Monitor thoughtfully and recharged it.

"Lieutenant, you can't do that!" Doc Dunbar croaked.

"I already did. You want to argue about it?" I flexed my fist and got

a fix on his slightly jowled chin.

"No," he said firmly. "I do not. I know a lunatic when I see one. Two lunatics. Go ahead and dispose of yourselves. And take the JJ-1 with you."

"Be sure to get all this straight in your report, Major," Stoney said gently. "We'll be back."

The thunder of the six primary jets were sweet music, but it lasted only three minutes ATO. At 100,000 feet I opened the side jets to start the max curve that would take us through the cold wall at the angle of least resistance. The thunder thinned to a low whine. In sixteen minutes we were clear. Stoney worked the computer, checking equations from the chart. The shock-proof control seats were about three feet apart. I put my hand on the red knob that cut the jets, and watched for his signal. It came. I cut the jets. We were free in the Vac. I waited forty seconds and touched the lever that started up the electro-mag spinner currents. This was the real test. If the electro-mag waves could duplicate the aura of a spinning body, the JJ-1 could navigate the Vac like the core of a sphere, like the axis of a spinning globe. It could, and did. The acceleration was terrific, although we didn't feel it. We seemed to be suspended, motionless in the black void. There would be faint light where the sun hit the shell of the craft, and the distant planets would look much brighter and bigger out here, but we were not interested in anything but the control board. There was no sound at all now, and when Stoney spoke, his voice sounded weird. It sounded hollow and ghost-like. Suddenly I wanted to laugh, like a crazy kid.

What he said was: "She seems to respond fairly well."

"Fairly well!" That was Stoney. His JJ-1 had just accomplished the

impossible, and he thought she was doing fairly well.

"We'll head straight for the target," he said, in the same tone of voice he might have used to say: "I'm going across to the mess."

IT'S A GOOD thing one of us was calm. I was in such a hurry to hit that target, I almost pitched the wrong curve. His hand was quicker, and caught my big paw in time.

"Easy, Steve. We've got plenty of room out here. Number 32 resistor."

It was really something, to be using resistor rays to check and guide a small craft. We had used sixteen-jet propulsion to navigate that atmosphere, and switched successfully to ray repulsion to navigate the Vac. Of course, we still had to switch back to jets in order to return to base. But meantime we were headed for the moon in a fully armed JJ. Sure, it was unofficial. But who was going to object if we slugged the pirates, just in passing?

The location of the pirate base was no problem. They had simply taken over the expensive construction abandoned by the Monitors. Stoney switched on the visor plate, and we saw a series of round, black humps on a gray desert plain. The difficulty was in maneuvering the JJ-1 for attack. No atmosphere. We were still on resistor rays, and going like Mercury, about 1800 miles a minute. It took some calculating, but we did it. At 40,000 feet we gave them a full blast from the resistors. The charge shot us nearly 200 miles off the face of the moon, and the little JJ-1 bucked some, but there was no shock. What it did was throw the spinners off and it took fourteen minutes to recover equilibrium, and check all the instruments.

But that was only our way of an-

nouncing our visit. We had something better than that. We came around on the target again, and Stoney tuned up the tele-mag. We got a brief close-up of the base, and saw one of the seized liners being eased out of its berth. Somebody had decided to leave. That told us the resistor rays had taken effect. It was probable that they had partially neutralized the power on the base. It would take a lot of repairing to put the burned-out cables in working order. But if the hit had been strong enough to do that, it must also have killed a good handful of the inhabitants. Some of them may have been unwilling prisoners. It was like the Twentieth-Century. The weapons of war could not discriminate between the guilty and innocent.

The next pass was tricky. We cut off the spinners and used the resistors to reduce speed. We both got a touch of nausea and nearly blacked out. Stoney increased the oxygen and it helped. We went in on a smooth glide, all the way down to 4,000 feet. I was dizzy and sicker than any acceleration could make me. Deceleration is far worse, it affects your brain and nerves with a terrible depression, so that you don't want to come out of it. I think if it had been anyone else but Stoneface beside me then, I wouldn't have wanted to come out of it. I'd have let her go on and crash.

"Visor plate!" Stoney snapped at me in the midst of the glide.

I REACHED out listlessly and adjusted the focus. The mounds of the base loomed up large and ugly. Off to the right the big liner was still moving jerkily. It had cleared its berth and was being propelled out onto the plain. Stoney was using the computer with his own table of equations, which he had worked out for this kind of job.

"Steady on," he said, and I held her to that lazy glide that was taking us nearer and nearer to certain destruction.

There was a blinding flash from the visor plate, and I blinked involuntarily, and then caught the second flash. That was it. Two shots of the deadly Monitor rays from the slim barrels in the belly of the JJ-1.

"Up resistor!" Stoney barked, and my arm responded as if it belonged to him. It certainly didn't belong to me. Nothing did. I had come all apart.

Stoney talked me out of it. I don't know what all he said. Just his voice, steady and even, and completely sure. Giving directions, making unnecessary remarks. We came off the moon on resistor rays, accelerating at a carefully measured rate. My heart was pounding and I was breathing as hard as if I had pushed a ton of Uranium up a long hill. My head and lungs felt like they were bursting.

"Spinners, Steve. Easy on. Front and rear. They're still burning..."

Later, he said: "They were trying to hit us with resistor rays from that liner. They couldn't even come close. It was like trying to hit a mosquito with one of your Twentieth-Century cannon balls."

"That was the Nineteenth Century. When they used balls. In the Twentieth Century they had shells, and bombs. They had—"

"All right. Make it a Nineteenth-Century mosquito. What's a few hundred years, more or less? On course, Lieutenant. Check your curves."

I was all right. I could see again. I could read the chart. I could read the chart fine, but I had my own ideas about how to come in. We curved into the earth aura and cut the spinners. There was a bad few seconds when

I killed the resistors too fast and the JJ-1 went into an involuntary spin off contact. If we hit the cold wall like that...

"Off resistors!" Stoney shouted.

"They're off, that's what—"

"Leave 'em off. A blast might tear us apart in a G-spin. Single jets, count twenty, to three."

I cut in the first three tail jets, one at a time with a count of twenty between. They made a shrill, angry whine, but they corrected the crazy spin and sent us straight toward earth in a nose dive. Then we had quite a job hauling her around into the max curve again. We were plenty off course, so I put her off a little more while Stoney was busy checking his recorded calculations for the report. He trusted me on atmospheric, and he didn't notice a thing until we came down out of the stratosphere for a landing check. Nothing had been damaged. The JJ-1 purred along on three jets under the atmospheric roof.

"What's the matter with your navigation, Lieutenant?" he inquired coldly. We were coming in over the Atlantic Coast, instead of the Pacific.

"That spin must have thrown me off. Sorry, sir."

He threw me a sharp look and relaxed. His face was a little gray now, and strain showed around his eyes and mouth.

"Do you think you can find the base, or do I have to take over?"

"I can make it—sir. There's one thing sure, I'm going to give Doc Dunbar a burning. Him and his green mush! That diet is no more necessary than hogwash. Look at you!"

"You can't prove it by me. I've been on the diet, too. The same as you. Just in case."

"Oh. You must have expected—

something like this."

"I thought one of you might fluke out. I didn't know which one. I know now. When did you find out Captain Crane meant to steal the JJ-1?"

"How did you know—"

"Just from what you told me. It was obvious. You were trying to protect Stella Crane—your wife. You couldn't accuse her brother without involving her. When did you find out about it?"

"Last night. He told me himself. He thought I was a cinch to go along. But Stella..."

"Now that you've made the test without Crane, it should not be too difficult to clear your wife. She'll have to take the role of informer. Prove she was dominated by her brother."

"She was! She's innocent. But she'll help me get the proof we need. That Braymore!"

"You may be going back to a court martial for that."

"Yes, sir." Courts martial, regulations—I'd worry about all that later. Right now I was bringing in the JJ-1. And the hell with the traffic laws. I started alternating jets in a routine pattern test.

"You don't have to do that—now!"

"Might as well let 'em know we're back!" I grinned at him. And with no more warning than that, I cut in all sixteen jets with a roaring crash at 30,000.

SHE LEAPED like a startled thunderbolt and ripped the sky wide open. This was my idea of the way to bring in the JJ-1, with roaring thunder and a mile long flaming tail, straight across the continent.

"Steve!" His mouth made the motion, but I couldn't hear a thing. He was flattened in his chair, and I had

my hands on the controls, but he made no attempt to interfere.

We slashed across Monitor City in the middle of the continent, and it must have been terrific. We shook the earth and burned up the sky. We were a frightful phenomenon. We grounded everything in a radius of 2,000 miles. But they knew what it was all right. It was the JJ-1, back from battle and roaring a song of triumph on a red-hot rampage.

That roaring return tickled the newsmen silly. The local reps were already trying to get past the guards when we came steaming in and sat down on our tail, hotter than the devil's pitchfork.

The field men rushed the portable supports. And then we were delayed by the outer door. We had to blast it open.

Stoneface saw the JJ-1 sealed officially, and then I took his arm and helped him back to his office in the Administration building. It was hectic for a couple of hours, but we managed to round up most of the guards and restore some order. With the help of two excited lab assistants, Doc Dunbar gave us his amazed attention. Stoney was dead beat and so was I, but neither one of us wanted to rest, and Doc was afraid to give us drugs. He thought we should take baths—at a time like this!

"You're a nice guy, Doc, and I like you," I said. "But I'll be around. You can look at me every afternoon for the next two weeks, if you'll just let me get out of here now. I've got to see my wife."

"Oh...ah," Doc said.

"What's the matter?"

"She's gone. Captain Crane took Colonel Braymore and his sister off the base in the Colonel's official skimmer."

"What!" Stoneface snapped.

"I couldn't stop him from going, Colonel. He was in bad condition, but he was a Monitor man, and insisted on being removed. He was certain that you would not come back."

"Are you sure my wife went with them—willingly?"

"Why, no. I didn't see her, but she's gone. And she took the nurse that was attending her, too."

I tore out of the office and ran across the base like my own tail was on fire. I forgot I was dead beat. I think I knocked down at least three people who got in my way. Man or woman, I didn't know. Or care.

The cottage was dark and silent. I charged around the place, and didn't see anything I was afraid to see. I went to the cubicle and lifted the seal of the safe-well. I leaned over and pressed the platform down a few inches and held it down.

"Stella!" I yelled.

And she answered me. "Steve—oh, Steve!"

I nearly pulled the handle up through the platform when I hopped on. They were huddled down there. Stella and the nurse. They were scared half to death. Ben had threatened them. He had ordered Stella to go with him to Monitor City, and testify to a crazy rigamarole about Stoney and me, to prove we were members of the pirate gang.

She pulled a faint to stall him off, but they couldn't get out of the house. It was the nurse who thought of the safe-well, when Stella declared she would die rather than give in. The nurse didn't feel like dying for me. It took nerve, what they did. Ben had sealed the exits with the magnetizer, and stood guard in the central room. They started a fire in Stella's bedroom, using the only inflammable ma-

terial on hand. All of Stella's clothes. When Ben came to investigate, Stella ran to the central room and disconnected the magnetizer to release the exits, then ducked back to the cubicle where the nurse had the automatic drop ready to go.

STELLA Was a wan-looking waif, compared to the lush bundle I had married, but she looked awfully good to me. We staggered into the central room, and collapsed on the divan in each other's arms.

The nurse came and stood there, straightening her uniform and looking around as if she had forgotten something.

"Well, I guess if you don't need me, Mrs. Burns, I'd better report back to Major Dunbar," she said primly.

"Oh, my pearls!" Stella said. She had them in the pocket of her robe. The doll! She had burned up all her clothes and saved a string of pearls. She held out her hand and the Venetian pearls dripped through her fingers like hot tears.

"Here, Sarah," she said softly. "They're yours."

"Oh! Oh, Mrs. Burns, how can I—"

"Take them, so you'll always remember how grateful I am. If it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't be sitting here now with my husband."

Sarah took them and went away, walking as if she had wings on her heels. I dragged myself off the divan and went to the speaker. I asked for the CO and gave my number and caused a small flurry in the communications center.

"Colonel Stone," the grave, tired voice said courteously.

"Lieutenant Burns, sir. How about twenty-four hours' leave?"

All I got was silence. "With my wife," I added.

"You found her," he said softly, and sighed. I hoped it was a sigh of satisfaction. "Twenty-four hours' leave is granted, Lieutenant, subject to recall under emergency conditions."

"If you do what you're supposed to do, you won't be in any condition to recall anything for the next twenty-four yourself. Go to bed, Stoney. It's done. We raised the roof and blew it to Kingdom Come. There's no more roof, but the hard part is yet to come. All that paper work—you know?"

"I know. And you won't be any help on that. However, you won't have any trouble with Braymore. He and your brother-in-law arrived in Monitor City just before you—er, lost control of the jet-neck and roared over. It made their story look very silly. They are being held for a full board investigation. I talked to the Exec-Chairman and he said the Defense Committee would also be placed under investigation."

"Thank you, sir. I'll, uh...I'll try to develop some evidence during my twenty-four."

"No hurry, Lieutenant." His voice sounded dry, but I knew he had that look. "The Board is never hasty in these matters. However, it might be well to seal the Crane cottage on my orders, for later examination. Good night, Steve."

"Good night, Stoney." I grinned and flipped the magnetizer, sealing the exits, and shutting out the world. I started toward the divan, and Stella was smiling.

I don't remember crossing the room, I was lost, drowning in wide, limpid blue eyes...



The book might have a high resale value, which was all that interested Fred . . .

READ IT AND WEEP!

By Peter Worth

To get rich, Fred needed a single look at the future. But what he failed to see was how to interpret what he saw there . . .

IT WAS the second floor of a large book store. The table was less than ten feet from the broad stairs that led down to the main floor. The book, neatly wrapped in blue paper, lay on the brown expanse of the otherwise empty table. Carelessly laid beside the book was a sales receipt. There were no clerks in sight, and the few browsers were intent in their browsing along the walls of books that went from floor to ceiling.

The small thin man with the sharp nose and close-set, bright eyes transferred the wrapped book from the table to a secure spot under his arm. The sales slip went into his pocket. As he tripped down the stairs, a well-dressed, rather bookish appearing man was ascending in a leisurely but purposeful stride.

The short thin man with the book under his arm was out on the sidewalk by the time the bookish appearing man had located a clerk.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Carter," the clerk said, his face lighting up in recognition of the man. "I have the book wrapped and ready for you." He went to the table. "That's odd," he said as his eyes searched the empty expanse. "I'm sure I laid it here less than ten minutes ago. It was only that long

ago that I called Mr. Blake, wasn't it? I wrapped it to have it ready for you right after I called."

"Probably someone picked it up by mistake," Mr. Carter said. "You should have laid it somewhere out of the way. When you locate it call Mr. Blake again."

"I'm awfully sorry," the clerk said contritely. "If I find it I'll make sure this doesn't happen again."

"Of course it will show up," Mr. Carter said, his smile attempting to set the clerk at ease. "Whoever picked it up will return it as soon as they discover their mistake."

But the small thin man had no intention of returning it. At the very instant Mr. Carter pushed through the doors to the street from the bookstore, he was climbing the narrow stairs to his third floor room three blocks away on a side street.

His feet echoed loudly on the bare floor of the hall. His thin nose was immune to the faint, eternal odor of boiled cabbage that emanated from the once gaudy wallpaper. His ears were deaf to the sharp tones of a woman coming from behind a door farther down the hall.

At a varnished door bearing the legend "3C" he twisted the doorknob.

The hinges creaked as the door swung open. There was a loud sharp report as it swung shut behind him.

The man lying on the bed swung over and stood up in one movement. He was tall, stoop-shouldered, and perhaps fifty-five years old, to the short thin man's forty or so years. His somewhat large, characterless eyes fixed on the package.

"Where'd you get the money to buy something, Fred?" he asked.

"Buy?" Fred echoed derisively. "It was already wrapped. I just picked it up and walked out with it, Joe."

He took the book out from under his arm and held it up, turning it in his hand to exhibit all sides of it.

"Might be worth only a quarter—or five bucks," he added, "but I thought I'd take a look at it first—sort of familiarize myself with it before I sell it to another store."

Joe took it from Fred's hand and pecked at the knot until he untied it. The wrapping paper came off, revealing the book.

ITS COVER was of faded brown. Gold letters proclaimed that it was, "Recollections and notes of Peter Wakefield, as collected and compiled by his granddaughter, Genevieve Stevens."

Fred took the book from Joe and opened it to the title page. There the title was repeated, and at the bottom was the information that the book had been printed in 1863.

It was a quite thick volume, with pages of stiff unyielding paper, yellowed by age. Fred carried it over to the table by the window, pushed aside a scattered pile of lurid magazines and laid it down.

As he let go of it, it fell open, to lie open on the table. It was as if it had been opened to that page so many times that it tended to open there.

The page was one hundred and twenty-seven.

By some quirk of fortune, Fred's eyes settled half way down the right-hand page. There he saw a date. It was August 7, 1950.

"What's the date today, Joe?" he asked without lifting his eyes.

"August fourth, I think," Joe said hesitantly.

"August fourth," Fred said slowly. "The seventh would be three days from now."

His eyes skimmed the page, finally settling on the left-hand page. There was the beginning of the passage, and another date.

"June 8, 1831," he read. "This day I am strangely disturbed by a vision that came to me while sleeping in the early hours of the morning. In the vision I seemed to leave my body and stand beside my bed, looking down at my mortal vehicle, yet not a part of it. Then, swiftly, some force seemed to seize me in its clutches and swirl me through vast distances at breathtaking velocities. When the motion ceased I seemed to be in a sphere of soft light that centered about the figure of a man in strange yet familiar clothing.

"I seemed drawn to the man. The power possessing me drew me toward him magnetically, so it felt, until, against my natural reluctance, I seemed to be entering the very space he occupied. And with a strange sensation I was abruptly entirely within him, and seeming to be looking out of his eyes, though that does not seem possible.

"In a moment it began to feel natural to do so. I saw that there was another person in the room—for it was indeed a room. The man saw me look at him, and smiled in a friendly manner. His speech, though English, sounded somewhat strange in an un-

definable way. 'Hello,' he said cheerfully. 'I'm Mr. Blake. Could you tell me your name?'

"Of course," I answered, 'and since you have told me yours I will tell you mine. My name is Peter Wakefield. Could you tell me where I am and what time it is?' And he answered, 'You are at 345 Grove Street, in the city of Cranton, and it's eight in the evening of August 7, 1950.'

"This so startled me that I awoke, to find myself in my own bed, the vision gone.

"It disturbs me strangely. The vision was as vivid as reality, yet how could it have been real, since it is 1831 rather than 1950? What could it have meant? Does that date have some strange significance? Since it may, I am writing this record to leave among my papers so that when that day comes there will be some verification of the occurrence."

FRED straightened slowly, a thoughtful expression on his sharp features, a light of excitement in his bright eyes.

"Think the thing's worth more than a buck or two?" Joe asked skeptically.

"A buck or two?" Fred said disdainfully. "I've hit the jackpot. Read what I just read and see if I'm right."

He pointed with a stained fingernail as Joe took his place at the table to read. But when Joe finished, his eyes held only puzzlement.

"I don't get it," he said. "Of course the guy was a crackpot. But how does this make the book worth anything?"

"Don't you get it?" Fred said, his voice purring with excitement. "Sure the guy was just having a dream, but we can make that dream come true."

"Yeah?" Joe said doubtfully, his eyes growing troubled as they studied Fred.

"Somewhere in this city of Cranton is at least one guy named Blake. I think I remember 345 Grove Street. It's about like this place. All we gotta do is find Blake and take him there, and put on an act, taking our cues from this book, and we can sell him the book for some real money."

Joe shrugged fatalistically.

"We can try it," he said. "The worst that can happen is that we'll have to sell it to a second-hand store anyway. So why not? Three days before we pull it off. We'd better find some ready cash to last us until then."

Fred tore off the corner of a magazine page to use as a book mark, and closed the book, patting its aged cover with affection. He was, subtly, a different man now, with a purpose in life. By nature an intellectual, all it had taken to raise his spirit from the level of petty thievery to that of a confidence man was an angle worthy of his metal.

A LUCKY break brought Fred eight dollars and seventy cents. It was one of those chance things. A new book store in the north end of town, the proprietor out for the moment, but trustingly leaving his door open for customers to come in, Fred's quick selecting of several good books off the shelves, and the elementary matter of selling the proprietor his own books when he returned.

Fortified with folding money, he went around to 345 Grove Street. It was a four-story walk-up apartment house. Two concrete steps led to the entrance. One of the windows to the left of the entrance bore a cheap cardboard sign: Parani Yogan, Spiritual Advisor. A window to the right of the entrance bore a similar sign which said: Apartment For Rent, apply janitor.

Just inside the entrance was a board

listing the tenants, with a small push-button beside each name. Fred pushed the one beside the janitor's card. A moment later an old man with an aura of defeat in life built in to the angle of his back and the slack features of his large face appeared.

"I'm inquiring about the vacant apartment," Fred said. "Is it still for rent?"

"Yah," the janitor said disinterestedly. "I'll show it to you."

He turned and unlocked the door to the empty apartment. Fred followed him in, and spent five minutes giving the place the type of inspection he knew the janitor would expect of him.

"Well..." he finally said, pausing in the center of the living room, "I like it. But whether my wife will or not, I don't know." He flashed the janitor a frank smile. "She's out of town right now. Upstate at her mother's. I'll call her and have her come down and look at it."

"O.K.," the janitor said, turning toward the door.

"Only thing is," Fred called him back, "I don't know when she'll arrive, and she'll have to turn around and go right back. Her mother's sick, you know. Could you let me have a key? That way we can bob in, she can look it over, and then I can either return the key or rent the place, while she gets right back to her mother. Here's my card, just to show you I'm a reputable business man." He took a crisp white card he had collected from someplace and handed it to the janitor.

"Yes, sir," the janitor said with new respect. As he took the key off the ring and gave it to Fred, Fred wondered what name had been on the card. He had so many...

"It may be a couple of days," Fred said carelessly.

The janitor didn't seem to object,

so Fred left, rubbing his fingers delicately over the folding money he hadn't had to use, securely folded in the usually empty currency clip in his pocket.

Next step was to locate a man by the name of Blake. The phone book had listed eight people by that name. Out of those eight should be one who was both gullible and well-heeled—the necessary attributes.

Fred copied their addresses on a scrap of paper and used a little of his working capital for streetcar fare to look over their places of residence.

By midafternoon he had scratched five of them off the list. Those five lived in cheap neighborhoods, which was a fairly certain indication they had little money. Of the remaining three, one lived in a large house in a choice part of town, the second lived in an exclusive apartment building, and the third lived in a penthouse apartment atop a large, expensive hotel.

Over a frankfurter and cup of coffee in a hamburger joint, Fred considered each of the three. Each prospective sucker had his advantages and disadvantages. The one in the penthouse probably had the most ready cash, but was probably not gullible enough. The apartment-Blake might be O.K. on both counts. The Blake that had a house probably had a family with noseys kids and a shrewd wife. On the other hand, he would be a family man, and therefore probably more gullible. But he probably wouldn't have the ready cash the apartment house and the penthouse Blakes would have.

As Fred finished his small repast he decided to try the apartment-house-Blake first.

"**H**OW ARE you going to work it, Fred?" Joe asked. The two

had just finished a dinner of ham hocks and cabbage, and were relaxing over a cigarette and second cup of coffee, their elbows propped on the white surface of the cafeteria table. "That's what I can't figure. Are you going to show the guy the passage in the book and tell him he's pre-ordained to go there and recite his lines?"

"That's one possibility," Fred said, flickering ashes onto a slice of bread with studious deliberation. "Depends on what Blake looks like and how he reacts. But I've figured out a better line, if I can work it. We've got to make some money out of this some way."

"Yeah. Sure," Joe said understandingly. "That's another thing. How are we going to get money out of Blake? Ask him for twenty bucks or so for possession of the book?"

Fred pulled the sales slip he had taken with the book out of his pocket and looked at it. He had forgotten it until now, but Joe's mentioning of money had made him think of it. The figure on it made him whistle. Thirty-five dollars!

"The guy that was going to buy this was paying thirty-five bucks," he said. "That's a lot of dough, but it makes what I have in mind more easy." He leaned forward, using his cigarette as a baton to emphasize his words.

"Remember the old classic about one guy going into a hock shop and asking for some unusual thing and offering to pay a huge price if one can be picked up?" he said. "Then the other guy comes in later in the day with just that thing and wants twice what it's worth—but still way less than the other guy said he would pay for it?"

"Yeah," Joe said. "The pawnbroker hates to pay so much but he can't turn

down a quick ten dollars, so he pays it, and the other guy never comes back."

"That's it," Fred said. "Only we do it different. You take this book down to Morten's Old Book Store and leave it on consignment, telling them it's a rare book, and you want them to sell it for a hundred—no, two hundred dollars. You won't take a cent less."

"Yeah?" Joe said, mystified.

"In the book," Fred went on, "Peter Wakefield snapped out of it before he could say anything more. That's all the better. You can be the spiritual medium that he talked through, and if he did it, what's to stop another spirit from taking over right after and saying that Peter Wakefield wrote it in a book, and the book can be found at Morten's?"

"Ah ha!" Joe said, his voice soft with admiration. "So he hightails it to Morten's and buys the book, then I go there and get the money."

"Right!" Fred said, his narrow face creasing into a smile, his finger jumping in emphasis and flicking ash into his coffee.

"That should make getting Blake interested more easy," Joe said, his mind fitting the scheme together. "This other spirit could have talked through me and said to bring Blake to a seance because something very important was going to happen to him."

"Sure," Fred said. "That's the way I figured it." He glanced up at the wall clock. "Seven-thirty. I'd better be getting over to see this guy, Blake. He might be going out for the evening."

BLAKE, Mr. Arthur Blake, the one Fred had classified as the apartment-house-Blake, was as short as Fred himself. But with that the re-

semblance ended. Where Fred's physiognomy was narrow, rather wedge-shaped and sharply alert, Arthur Blake's was broad of jaw, large of teeth, wide of eyes, pudgy of nose, and with a smoothly rounded, sparsely covered dome. Also, his skin was the color usually described as florid.

His glasses distorted his eyes in such a way that they seemed to lie just behind the lenses like light blue yolks under cellophane cups. His trousers of blue pinstripe were much sat in but expensive enough to look well in spite of that and his too broad hips. His white shirt was in its second day of usage.

His smile, as he stepped back from the open door to allow Fred to enter, was sincere and politely curious.

Fred came in, his eyes taking in the quiet furniture and thick rug with a satisfied gleam. No one else was there.

There was a quiet click as Arthur Blake closed the door. As he pointed to a chair he had the air of half hospitality of someone not sure whether the guest is a salesman or of some more welcome species of humanity.

Where Fred was seated, Blake remained standing, an expression on his face that made Fred think of a Cocker asking to be let outside. A soft eagerness tinged with anxiety.

"You're Arthur Blake?" Fred asked importantly to add fuel to the other's curiosity.

"Yes, of course," Arthur Blake answered, hastily reviewing his list of relatives in the light of the possible death of one of them with a reasonable estate, and coming up with two possibilities. "Would you like a drink or a cigar?"

"I believe I would," Fred said inclusively, and leaned back in the chair with an air implying that his

business could wait until the two items were provided.

"Tell me a little about yourself, Mr. Blake," Fred said after he had taken several appreciative puffs on the cigar. His manner implied that the question was some sort of a test he expected Blake to pass before he came down to business.

"Well," Arthur Blake said uncertainly. "I come from Paris, Illinois. That's where I was born—thirty-seven years ago. I had an older brother and sister, both dead now. Several relatives..." He looked at Fred from behind his thick glasses to see if the mention of relatives struck a responsive chord. Fred, his eyes on the glowing tip of his cigar, nodded solemnly.

Arthur Blake continued talking about himself, doubtful of his course, but feeling his way along cautiously. When Fred's glass was empty he hastened to refill it with straight bourbon and ice cubes.

When he stopped talking it was suggestive of the last few movements of a mechanical toy with a weakened spring. And the silence was heavy as Fred seemed to roll what had been said along his lips with the cigar, flavoring it.

"Have you ever been interested in spiritualism or things like that?" Fred shot at him without warning.

ALARM at vague threats of clauses and conditions in wills flooded into Arthur Blake's mind.

"Well," he floundered desperately, "you might say I have and I haven't. I've always been curious about such things—in a way—even attending a seance once several years ago, and I often donate to various—things..."

He paused, hoping his answer had been sufficiently vague to be taken as

a yes or no, whichever might be required. The asking-dog look was about him again.

"That's good," Fred said after a moment. "Very good. I'm happy to know that you have a real interest in such things. That explains—" He hitched forward in his chair, putting his half empty glass on the coffee table near the chair and taking the cigar out of his mouth. "You see, Mr. Blake," he said solemnly, "a most unusual thing has happened, and it may be of extreme importance to science. It may be the final proof of the existence of the supernatural."

"Yes?" Arthur Blake said, his emotions torn between the slow realization that the point being led up to was not that of a legacy, and a growing curiosity as to how he entered into a final proof of the supernatural.

"A very close associate of mine," Fred said, pronouncing the words with quiet emphasis, "is an outstanding psychic—in fact, one of the world's greatest. Last night a very great personage was speaking through him. You would be skeptical if I told you who this great personage is, and it's unimportant anyway." Fred dismissed the importance of the great personage with a wave of his hand that ended with the cigar back between his teeth. Arthur Blake, thoroughly hypnotized, waited for the next words.

"Though neither I nor this associate of mine had ever heard of you before in our lives," Fred went on, "this great personage gave your correct name and address, and some of your past history that you have verified just now in what you said about yourself, and—" Fred stopped talking long enough to take a deep breath—"he said that you are to be present on the night of August seventh shortly before eight o'clock, at

which time something of supreme importance will be revealed to you—what, he didn't say."

"Well," Arthur Blake said doubtfully.

"Surely it's a little thing," Fred said smoothly. "To set your mind at rest, neither my associate nor I are interested in money. In fact, I'll call for you and take you there in a taxi at my own expense, and bring you back. Our interest is purely scientific, nothing more." He watched the suspicion die down on Blake's face, then added the clinching argument. "The very fact that this great personage correctly named your address and described your past is conclusive evidence to me that what he said was true."

The logic in this impressed Arthur Blake. He nodded his head in agreement.

"That's day after tomorrow, isn't it?" he asked. At Fred's nod he added, "All right. I'll do it. Only, you don't need to call for me. Just give me the address and I'll be there. I have my own car."

FRED LET Joe into the apartment-house with a feeling of complete confidence. All the cards were in his hands. Joe had taken the book to Morten's Old Book Store. The proprietor had expressed doubt that the book would bring two hundred dollars, and had made his own offer of thirty dollars, good anytime—so there was a guarantee of thirty dollars in case Blake didn't buy it.

Now the only possible hitch would be if the janitor was the curious type, and he had seemed just the opposite before. Fred rang the janitor's bell with the idea in mind of reassuring him and seeing that he stayed out of sight, his suspicions unaroused. There was no answer.

He unlocked the door to the vacant apartment, switching on the lights as he stepped inside. He went to the window and took out the for rent sign, while Joe explored.

"I'll sit in that chair in the corner," Joe said finally. "We can put the floor lamp just behind me, and turn off the other lights. My face will be in the shadow, and the light will half blind him anyway."

"Not that he could see much anyway," Fred said. "Wait until you see his glasses."

A knock sounded. Fred hurried to the door, feeling a second or two of nervousness. When he opened the door he saw that it was someone who had knocked at the door opposite. All he could see of the tall man at the other door was an expensively tailored topcoat and gray hat. The other door opened while he was hesitating. There was a glimpse of a dark face topped by a white turban. Fred closed the door hastily so that the man wouldn't see him.

A moment later there was another knock, this time obviously on the panel of their own door. Fred opened the door again with a warm smile, to see Arthur Blake's owlish eyes blinking at him.

"Come right in, Mr. Blake," he said, stepping back invitingly.

Arthur Blake took off his hat and stepped inside.

"This is my associate in psychic research," Fred said. "Dr. Rudyard Rasputin."

"How do you do, Arthur Blake," Joe said solemnly, mouthing his words in a foreignish way.

"Howdy, doctor," Blake said nervously.

"Why," Blake lifted his arm and glanced at his wristwatch, "it's three minutes to eight."

"We'd better get ready then,"

Fred said hastily. "Joe, sit down over there while I turn out the lights—ha ha, I always call Dr. Rasputin Joe, you know," he added guiltily to Blake.

Joe sat down. Fred turned out the ceiling lights, leaving only the floor lamp behind Joe turned on. He carried a chair to the center of the room and placed it so that Blake would have to look almost directly into the exposed floorlamp globe to see Joe's face.

"Now the thing to remember, Mr. Blake," Fred said hurriedly, "is to be quick and obliging. If he asks you your name, just say, 'My name's Blake.' If he asks you where he is, tell him, 'You are at 345 Grove Street, in the city of Cranton.' That's important, because it takes a terrific amount of power for the spirit to hang on even for a minute."

"Of course, of course," Arthur Blake said, small beads of nervous perspiration on his smooth pink forehead.

A DEEP, groaning sigh came from where Joe sat. It was so deep, so startling, that Fred turned in alarm. Joe's face was in the shade, but his eyes were wide, and seemed to be glowing slightly.

"Hello," Arthur Blake's voice sounded almost cheerfully at Fred's back. "I'm Mr. Blake. Could you tell me your name?"

Fred started at the horribly familiar words.

"Of course," came from Joe's lips in sepulchral tones. "And since you have told me yours I will tell you mine. My name is Peter Wakefield. Could you tell me where I am and what time it is?"

That was O.K.. Joe had memorized his lines...

"You are at 345 Grove Street," Ar-

thurs Blake's voice sounded almost too calm and assured, "in the city of Cranton, and it's eight in the evening of August 7, 1950."

Fred's scalp prickled. This was the very words in the book!

Joe's frame jerked slightly. There was a still moment, then a sort of a gurgle from deep in his throat.

"I'm very sorry," Joe spoke, his accent clipped and strange. "The experiment is somewhat of a failure, yet I knew it would be, since it is recorded already. Peter Wakefield is from the past. This experiment he has just had here has already been written in his notes, and appeared in a book published in 1863 by his granddaughter, Genevieve Stevens. The only copy of this book remaining in material existence is on a shelf in Morten's Old Book Store. If you go there you will find it. This book is positive proof that time travel is possible, for in the moment that Peter Wakefield was here, he was also alive and asleep in his own bed in the year 1831."

Arthur Blake had a pen and notepad out, and was writing swiftly. Fred saw this and smiled happily.

The writing finished, Blake stuffed the notepad in his pocket. No more sounds came from Joe. Blake stood up.

"If that book is there," he said in suppressed excitement, "this will explode on the scientific world like the atom bomb!"

"It seems fantastic!" Fred said, matching Blake's mood. "Such a book would be worth a fortune!"

"If it's there I'll get it," Blake said confidently. "I'll bring it around with me as soon as I get it."

"We'll be waiting," Fred lied, switching on the ceiling lights.

Joe remained in his chair, his eyes

closed, apparently unconscious. Fred felt a secret satisfaction. Joe was playing possum to keep from giving himself away.

"You'd better go now," Fred said to Blake, playing along. "Sometimes he's very exhausted after such a trying ordeal. It would be better for him to find himself alone."

"I'll see you in the morning," Arthur Blake said, his voice filled with eagerness.

"We'll be here," Fred promised. He closed the door slowly after Blake left, smiling broadly as he did so. There was no doubt about the two hundred dollars any more. He only regretted that he hadn't had Joe name a price of five hundred, but it was too late now. Blake would be waiting when the book store opened.

Fred turned to Joe.

"It looks like it's in the bag, Joe," he said triumphantly.

Joe's slack face remained unmoving, his eyes half veiled by drooping lids.

"What's the matter, Joe?" Fred said uneasily. When Joe didn't move he said sharply, "Joe!"

TWO FRANTIC slaps brought a soul-deep groan and the stirrings of motion. A shudder shook Joe's body. He opened his eyes. Memory flowed into them. He sat up quickly and looked around in alarm.

"Where'd he go?" Joe asked. "Geez, I must have fallen asleep. What happened? Did he get mad and leave when I didn't go through with it?"

"Didn't go through with it?" Fred echoed, a curious tightness in his throat. "You don't remember reciting your lines? They were letter perfect!"

The two stared at each other, fear growing in their eyes.

"Let's get out of here," Joe said, clawing at the arms of the chair.

He reached the door and started to open it, then closed it to a mere crack. Fred peeked over his shoulder.

The same, expensively-tailored back was in the hall. The hat was off, revealing smoothly-combed black hair. A cultured voice was speaking.

"It's too bad nothing happened," it said. "I was so sure. But now we know that Peter Wakefield's dream was just that. Nothing more. The book—wherever it is—is valueless."

"I'm glad, in a way," a second voice, louder, and obviously belonging to the person in the hall, answered. "Since that part didn't happen, the rest can't happen. I would have stayed home just to prevent the rest from happening except for a certain fatalism in me that said that since Peter Wakefield said I was here, I had to be here, and couldn't avoid it."

"Yes," the other voice said. "We are strange creatures, to deliberately invite such a horrible end to us personally so that we might find for ourselves that man's mind is not always bound by the limits of the present. Good night, Mr. Blake."

"Good night," the man in the hall said. "Be sure and come to my penthouse party Saturday evening. My guests are expecting you."

The door opposite the one where Joe and Fred lurked closed softly. Brief footsteps in the hall ended with the opening and closing of the street door. But Fred and Joe didn't hear. They were looking into each other's eyes, seeing the horrible fear in each reflected in the other.

Neither had thought to read on from that one passage and see what else Peter Wakefield might have said. And Fred was now remembering that sign that proclaimed the tenant

across the hall to be a psychic. It was all horribly clear. There had been *two* Mr. Blakes at 345 Grove Street at eight o'clock.

A sudden thought sent Fred to the center of the room under the ceiling light. He extracted the bill of sale for the book from his pocket and looked at the name at the top. The name of the man the book had been charged to was Mr. Blake. The address, Fred saw, was that of the penthouse Blake.

"Your wife likes the apartment?" the janitor asked.

"Yes—no," Fred said. "That is, she isn't here yet. We're waiting for her. I expect her any minute. I'll let you know as soon as she comes and sees it."

"I'll be in the basement," the janitor said. "Just ring my bell."

He padded away from the door down the hall. Fred closed the door. Both he and Joe had eyes that were raw from sleeplessness. They had risen early and come back to the apartment after a hasty breakfast to wait for Arthur Blake and the book. There was nothing—could be nothing—in their thoughts but a compelling urge to read the fate in store for them. There was no room for doubt that it was in store for them, whatever it might be. Joe's blanking out during the "fake" enactment of the scene from that book had only one explanation.

"If only I hadn't swiped that book," Fred said in self-condemnation. "Then the other Blake would have got what's coming to us. Him and that Hindu guy."

"We should have read more," Joe said. "I can't understand why I didn't."

They stood silently, watching out the window for the arrival of Arthur Blake. From the basement came

sounds of hammer blows on metal as the janitor worked.

Fred took out a nearly empty pack of cigarettes and lit one, inhaling nervously.

Outside, a car drew to the curb and stopped. The pudgy body and magnifying-glass eyes of Arthur Blake appeared on the sidewalk.

Unmindful of the terrible urgency of his actions, he closed the car door and fumbled for the lock with the key, while Fred and Joe, inside, tried to hurry him by mental power alone.

Eventually, with the car safely locked, he crossed the sidewalk out of view. A moment later his knock came at the apartment door.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed triumphantly when Fred flung the door open. "And that very passage is in the book, too."

But he was talking to deaf ears, and the hand that had held the book was empty. Fred had plucked the book from his fingers, and he and Joe were bent over it on the dining table, reading.

THEY TURNED page after page, skimming hastily. Finally they came to a passage that began:

"July 9, 1831. This day I am strangely troubled by a dream connected with that of last month concerning the far future."

"This must be it," Joe said. Fred nodded. They read on.

"I dreamed," the words read, "that I was again plucked from my body and born to the future, in the way I was before. It was the same as before, except that now I seemed magnetically drawn toward Mr. Blake, who was standing behind two men, one of whom seemed to be the one I had been drawn into before."

"I felt magnetically drawn toward him, yet also repelled by some instinct, and, as one might be drawn helplessly into the vortex of a whirlpool, I felt myself drawn into him."

"Even as I entered his body I wondered how long or how short a time had elapsed since my other visitation; but I was never to know, for even as I felt myself settling into place within him, I felt the terrible upheaval of his entire body at my presence, and the terrible fear that possessed him at the feel of my presence. His mad spirit possessed me. I tried desperately to withdraw from his being. Blankness descended upon me. My next awareness was of standing over the battered bodies of those two unfortunate men, the remains of a stout chair held in my fists."

As one, Fred and Joe whirled to face Arthur Blake.

Too late...

THE END

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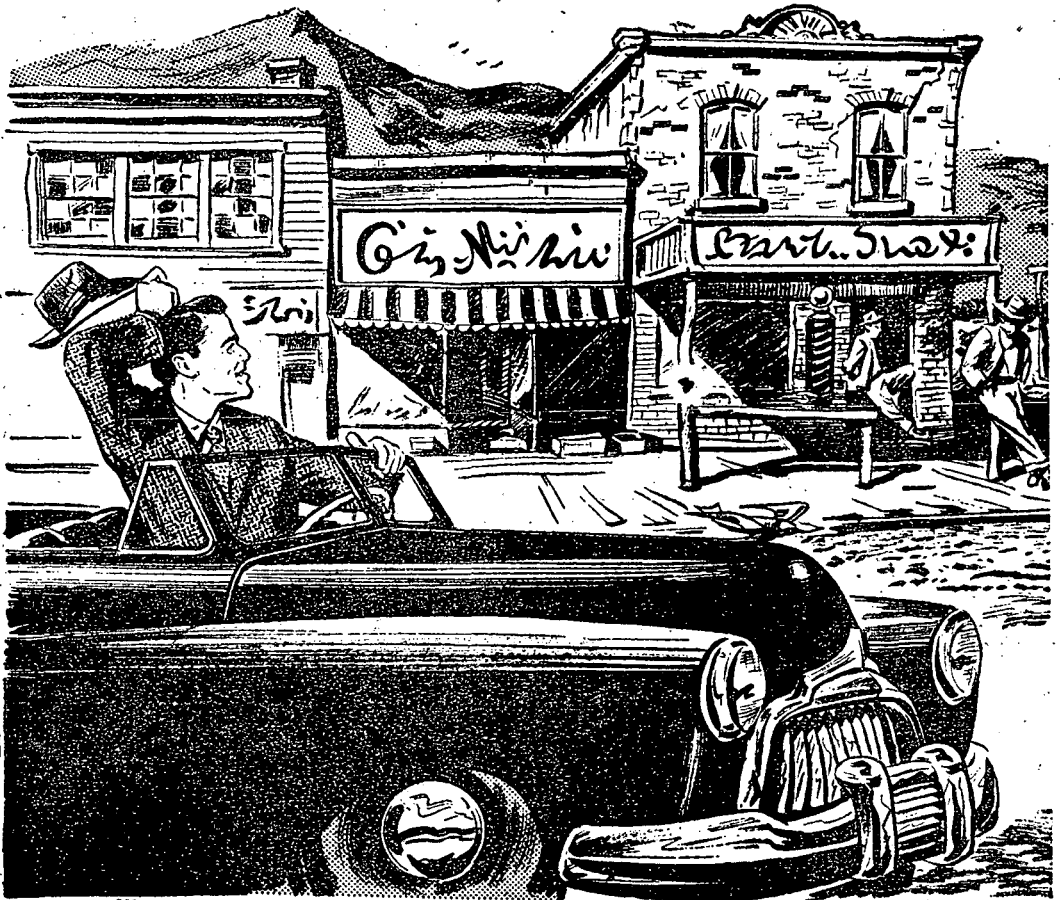
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**Millard first knew he and his friends
were close to some forbidden secret when
an invisible wall held their minds apart**



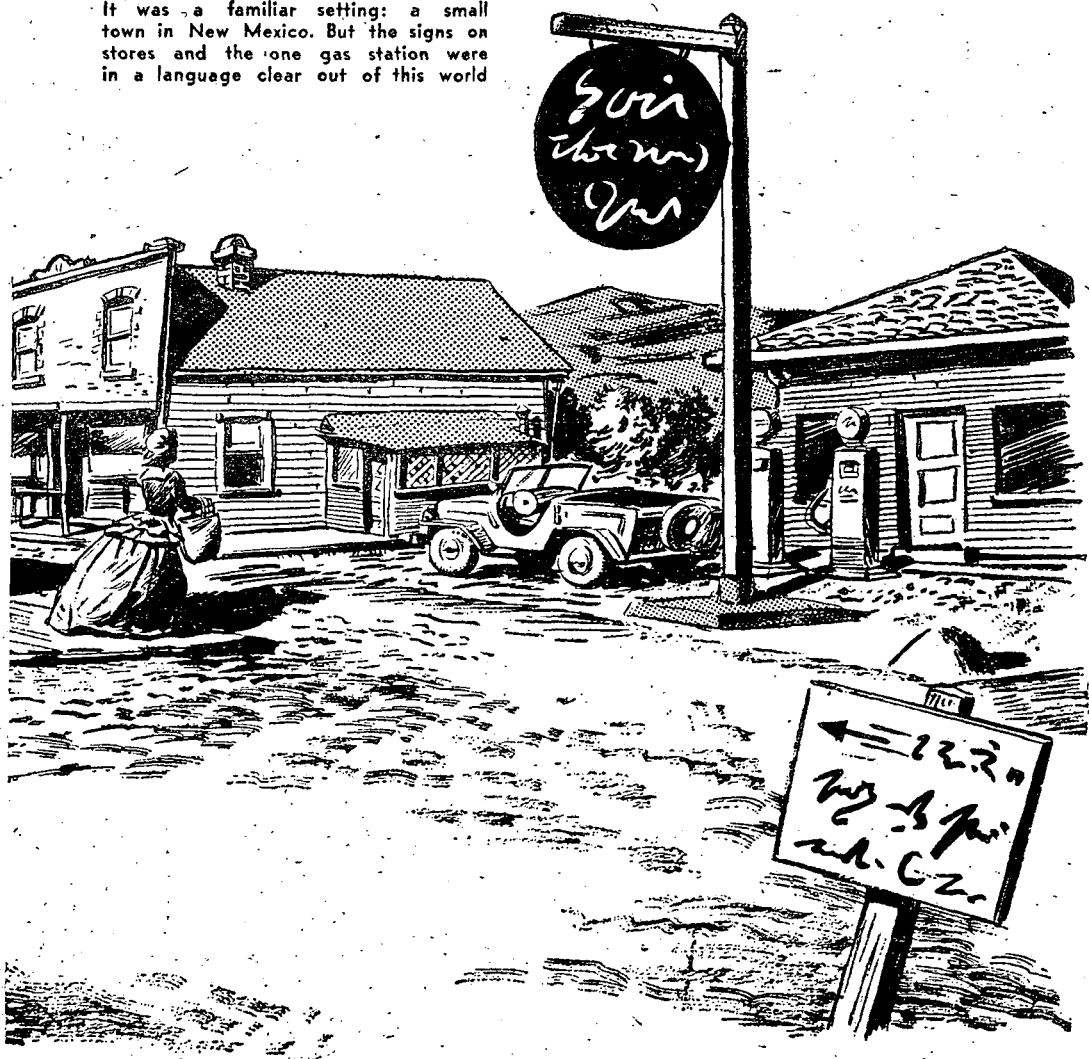
THE CAR purred sweetly through gine and tires blending into a the warm night, the sound of en-narcotic thrum. The black road rolled endlessly out of darkness, and beyond its shoulders gray stunted bushes flashed monotonously past, and only once in a while a ghostly yucca, crowned with pale bloom, drifted through the field of headlights.

John Millard found himself yawning, and switched on the dashboard

lights. He needed the speedometer, anyway, to assure him he was traveling a steady sixty, that only the desert's empty vastness made him seem to be crawling.

All the same, the will-o'-the-wisps ahead, that had beckoned from the world's dark rim for absurdly long, were undoubtedly growing and spreading out. Off to the right, far from the highway, he saw the bright square of a ranchhouse window and its reflection

It was a familiar setting: a small town in New Mexico. But the signs on stores and the one gas station were in a language clear out of this world



in an irrigation ditch. The firefly swarm ahead scattered and strung out along the die-straight line of the road: yellow lights of houses, the red and blue and green that meant filling-stations and motels and stores, a brave oasis of neon.

Presently Millard took his foot off the gas and the car began to slow with a sound like a long sigh. Cottonwoods rustled past and from beyond them came the methodical chug of a pump. The first outlying gas-station, a flood-lit stage set on a backdrop of darkness, sailed toward him...

Millard blinked at it, shook his head, and blinked again. Then he trod on the brake and slid to a gravel-spraying stop, and sat staring from under knitted brows.

The glaring red sign fronting the road—he couldn't read it. It seemed to be in an unknown alphabet, the shapes of whose letters, vaguely familiar, were yet unintelligibly alien. His gaze leaped to other signs, on down the highway. They were meaningless scrawls of flame.

It wasn't the night driving doing things to his eyes. He could plainly see the gas pumps, the row of electric bulbs above and the bright insects gyrating about them. On a sheet-metal sign nailed to the side of the building, a familiar beautiful girl held an utterly familiar bottle aloft like a beacon. But the letters on the sign meant nothing.

Presently Millard transferred his foot to the accelerator and pulled back onto the asphalt. In a sort of frozen trance he let the car drift ahead, down the highway-main street of the little town. Wherever he looked, it was the same. Lettered plate-glass windows, illuminated signs, a theater marquee and the posters on either side of the entrance below it—nothing made any sense.

Dizzy, he pulled up to the curb in front of a lighted drug store. The whole look of the place—he had seen its like in a thousand little towns—said "drug store," but the blue-glowing letters over the corner entrance said nothing.

Still Millard didn't stir for a time, his palms sweaty on the wheel. Then he flung open the door and climbed shakily out. He had to find out, even if it uprooted the conviction of his own sanity.

THE STORE'S interior was papered with advertisements of soft drinks, vitamins, ice cream, corn plasters. Not one word of them was legible. In their midst a little gray-haired man stood at bay, glancing fearfully about him; at the door's opening he faced it and made a pitiful effort to control his twitching face. He mumbled something at the newcomer.

Millard drew a deep breath. Insanity was postponed; the thing was real, in the sense that others saw it too.

"What's happened here?" he asked hastily.

* The druggist jarred back as if the question had been a blow. He shrank against a soda-fountain stool, and words spilled from his quivering lips. Words, by their complex inflections of terror mingled with questioning, pleading. But they were in no language Millard had ever heard.

"What's the matter?" he queried again in a voice that shocked him by trembling.

That he took a step forward was too much for the little man. He wheeled and bolted toward the rear of the store; his elbow grazed a pharmacy shelf and brought bottles crashing down, but he disappeared through a curtain without looking back.

Millard made no move to follow. He stood rigid, fighting the contagion

of panic. At his elbow was a magazine rack. Mechanically he picked up a gay-covered pulp, flipped it open to a random page. It gave the impression of a page of Russian—a haunting ought-to-be familiarity, that as you looked closer evaporated into strangeness.

Carefully he replaced the magazine, and his eye fell on a counter display of ballpoint pens with a scratchpad beside it. He took a pen, and let his hand write his own name on a blank sheet. Then he looked, and saw nothing but a scribble.

Stiffly Millard straightened. This, together with the druggist's fright and the almost-complete normality of the store, the street, the town, left no room for his first wild theory—that somewhere back along the black road he had driven unknowing across the dividing line between this and some other, alien world. The thing was in his mind; at least he was spared the lonely torment of knowing it to be in his mind alone.

Something had stretched out a hand and slammed a shutter in his brain, and his eyes saw and his ears heard, but no meaning came through to the imprisoned, logically thinking cortex. Something had closed a door, created a wall, as a psychologist's hand drops a sliding panel in front of a queuing, channeled rat to drive him into rat schizophrenia.

Something... He was on the street again, and involuntarily he looked up, into the black sky stabbed with stars. There was nothing there, no shadowy wings hovering over the Earth, and Millard laughed a short laugh that caught in his throat. Animistic thinking. Slugged by facts totally new to experience, he had reacted as his race had countless times in its haunted youth. But the stars, bright and unwinking in the desert sky almost as

the stars of space must be, steadied him. The constellations were right, the pointing Dipper and the Pole Star a third of the way up the invisible arc from horizon to zenith.

Somebody brushed against him as he stood with feet planted wide on the sidewalk; the man veered unsteadily away, muttering apologetically.

"Hey!" Millard arrested him with a gesture, pointed up the street toward what was evidently the bar the other had just left. "Can you read that sign?"

The drunk peered toward the flaming letters, grinned sheepishly and said something unintelligible. Then he flapped a hand at the street, a careless gesture of dismissal, and wandered off.

Millard smiled crookedly. There was one fellow who wouldn't be bothered, tonight, by whatever had hit this town. But others would, and there would be hell to pay. Just what form it would take he didn't know—but men robbed of speech would be animals, dangerous because frightened... From the bar came raised voices, thick with fear and alcohol. Millard turned back to the car.

HE COULD not know how far this thing extended, but he could guess. As he slid behind the wheel again, he glanced at the dashboard's dials. The figures on them were meaningless, even though he could identify most of them by position. But he was sure they had been readable when he switched on the lights, four or five miles out of town. Perhaps the shutter, the wall, hadn't been in place then; but, instinctively visualizing the affected area as a circle with, say, a twenty-mile radius, he located the town on the periphery. There was no Earthly reason for it to be the center.

He was seeking un-Earthly reasons,

though. Animistic thinking again, inventing motives for a willfully malignant power from outside.

The black highway was hissing under the wheels, the town's lights dwindling into a cluster in the rear-vision mirror, when he saw the side-road on the left. He braked hard and swung into it, and instantly stepped on the gas again, bouncing nerve-rackingly over a narrow asphalt strip pounded to pieces by heavy-laden trucks.

How many miles the road wound into the desert, over ridges and through arroyos, the speedometer couldn't tell him; at last the lights showed a high woven-wire fence ahead, blocking the road with a gate. Beyond it, the scrubby sameness of more bushes and sand.

Millard slowed to a crawl and let the car nose against the gate. It was heavily padlocked, but no one was in sight, no guards. He fed the engine carefully metered doses of power, the rear wheels buzzed and gripped again, then something snapped and the car lunged forward, wire clawing along one fender.

On the next long rise, there were lights ahead, low lights of windows off to the left and straight ahead a string of stars that rose far into the moonless sky, inclining a little eastward.

When the way was blocked by a second fence, and another road elbowed left, in the direction of the lighted buildings, Millard made the turn, then pulled up and left the car idling while he gazed toward the tower.

It was a good place to collect his thoughts. If he didn't look at the dashboard, he couldn't feel the wall in his mind. He could almost see the tower against the sky, its skeleton framework picked out by many lights.

Only around its base, where there should have been light and busy figures, was darkness, cloaking the hulked shoulders of machines.

He had seen no one. The armed men who should have guarded the gates back there and here were gone, swept away by the terror—primeval fear of the dark, perhaps, wakened by the glacial loneliness of finding themselves without speech. If any of those men were still around, Millard didn't want to meet them. The fear of stampeded beasts is terrible, but if those dumb beasts have been men...

He took a final look at the tower—not the loftiest structure of men's building, but the boldest, raised to defy the stars. If it was really the center, then you could hardly avoid supposing something that thought and acted like a man, that saw and feared and struck. A cosmic something cunning and powerful enough to strike at the weak point of its enemies' minds.

THE IDEA of a human agency crossed his thoughts hardly long enough to be consciously dismissed. It was too obvious that nowhere, on either side of the barrier men had erected across the Earth, was human science in hoping distance of producing the phenomenon of this wall. Psychology could do no more than label it an aphasia, a paralysis of vaguely-plotted speech centers in the brain... Why, then, keep giving anthropomorphic features to the power behind the wall? The blind interaction of mechanical forces may stimulate will and purpose wonderfully; a Brownian particle has no will, but does a molecular virus? Or an ant? Or, for that matter, a—

Annoyed at himself, Millard chopped the thought off short and set the car rolling again.

The long low structure with the

lights came near. Millard stopped, slid out and crunched up a gravel walk. The main door was ajar, and in the front office all the lights blazed, bathing its emptiness in pitiless white. It was wholly empty of people, except for the dead man lying face down on the floor.

Millard bent briefly, his mind seeming to click as it pigeonholed the emotions of shock and horror for more leisurely reference, and appended murder to the data that must presently add up to a logical total. It was logical to find that the dead man was Dr. Pell—no mistaking the fringe of gray hair that the blow from behind had mixed with blood and brains.

He straightened up and pushed open the right-hand door. That room too was brilliantly lit, and four men sat in it, each with his back to a corner. They glanced up, keeping silence, and the eyes of each shifted quickly back to vague anxious wandering over the others' faces.

Millard paused in the doorway, wondering if his own face looked as strained and strange as these. Probably not—they had been sitting here for sometime now. And he could sense the tension that had built up and up, with never a word to break it.

Where no words were, an action had to suffice. He moved forward to the middle of the room, focus of those frozen eyes, and looked down casually at the disordered papers atop the desk there. Neat typewritten sheets, perfectly illegible—Pell's final summary of the preparations, probably, finished save for Millard's report on the television arrangements, which Pell would never add... When he raised his head and turned slowly all the way around, it had worked a little; the web of stares was broken, and the faces were less like those of beasts in an unfriendly lair, more like those of men

he knew and had worked with to build the tower.

Carlsen, the atomic physicist, his plump face like a child's whose building blocks were electrons, protons, neutrons, force fields... MacLeod, the lanky astronomer, spiritual descendent of men who had longed toward the stars through many generations... Weidemann, who had built the impossible engine... Novinski, eyes veiled behind glittering lenses that suggested one of his robots that could see and interpret and almost think...

To take the final steps, to realize the dream that had brought these men together, called for one last synthesis of the knowledge locked in their separate brains. But the wall was between them now.

The wall—and worse. Millard had seen the animal suspicion in their eyes, and he knew as he looked about the room that it was in his as well. He too was looking for the murderer.

PELL HAD been the synthetist and leader among them, the only man who knew almost as much as all of them, and might have guided them, struck dumb as they were. So he was dead. Someone else's thoughts, recoiling from the wall, had taken the same path to an explanation that Millard's persisted in going. And had gone further, to a conclusion Millard would never make. Someone's loyalty was no longer to the tower, but to the force, personified as will, that seemed to forbid the dream of the tower.

He knew these men so well—Novinski the best, perhaps, since their fields, electronics and communications, interlocked so closely; and McLeod of old, from days before war and change—they two, Millard was sure, were the only ones with enough knowledge of psychology to appreciate the preposterousness of the wall... He knew

them, but he could not guess which of them would be most likely to create a demon and sacrifice to it in blood.

That question had to be answered first, though. In its terrible immediacy, it had already done enough to impede solution of the other, ultimately greater problem. The hopes he had built on these four were idle now.

Before questions could be asked, let alone answered, there had to be communication, however makeshift. The makeshift had already occurred to him, driving across the dark desert—his recognition of star patterns was a valuable indication.

He turned round once more, slowly, summoning each of them with a long look, trying to compel them with a gesture, and answering their distrust by pointing to the typewriter on the desk, amid the strewn papers.

They came, creeping hesitantly from their corners, shrinking from one another as wild beasts shrink from nearness. A word would be an uncouth explosion of sound to bring down an avalanche.

Standing well back so they could all see, Millard laid a hand on the keyboard. With deliberate care he struck three keys that clacked loudly on the bare black roller, startling as shots.

W...h...y...

He looked, and saw the dawn of understanding and hope in all their faces—even the murderer's.

The word was a ray of light into their darkness, a touch of warmth in their dread isolation. They understood, each out of his own imprisoned gropings for an answer, that *Why?* meant everything—the wall, its relation to the tower and the dead chief.

Millard stepped back, crooking a curt finger. The group shifted with a wary shuffling, and Novinski stood

before the typewriter. He stared at the keyboard through thick, impassive lenses, and his tapering index finger moved slowly, picking out letters as they watched.

Russia.

Millard restrained himself from any gesture. But with the corner of his eye, he saw another make the movement he had almost begun—a faint disbelieving headshake. Suddenly he felt a near certainty, and his muscles tensed with readiness.

Weidemann fanned blunt fingers over the keyboard; briskly he depressed the shift and struck the leftmost key in the top row. Quotation mark. *Ditto.*

Two of them, then, had made the humanly almost inevitable animistic assumption, and had equated the force, the *someone*, to a single well-worn symbol for all that moves formidably behind the veil. That, for them, was the end of thought. The symbol stood up, grimacing, threatening, barring the way... Novinski, at least, with his electronic creations that aped the organic brain, should recognize the unlikelihood of a human science beyond science that could have done this thing. But in Novinski's mind there was probably a queer inverted residue of old-country nationalism, brought to the surface by psychic turmoil. The impact of the unknown had roused the oldest, least reasonable strata in all their minds—including the one who had killed.

Carlsen frowned down at the machine, nervously stroking his chin. Then with tight precision he tapped out: *Radiation leak.*

That was better—a good down-to-earth hypothesis, at home in an ordered mechanistic universe. Only—it was no more than a lame guess, acknowledged as such by the physicist's hesitation. Carlsen, a wizard with pop-

ping nuclei and all manner of subtle particles, was a layman when it came to estimating the effect of his playthings on the human body and brain. Millard, who knew much less about the one field and a little more about the other, could not imagine a fortuitous energy escape with such a devastatingly specific effect. Atomic forces may sear and kill, but not tamper delicately with the mind.

THEN MILLARD was bracing himself to meet the crisis, for McLeod was stooping over the typewriter. The tall astronomer's eyes met Millard's for a moment, blue and blank of apparent emotion. His hands, veined, lean, and strong, began writing rapidly, while the watcher strained to follow the pattern of keys and words.

And they said, Let us build us a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven...

Someone made a choked sound, and McLeod straightened up. That was enough, a confession of faith and murder.

The pale blue eyes still held a curious look of placidity. The prophecy was fulfilled, the fanatic victorious, and the man was resigned... That was what fooled Millard. He barely jerked his head away from the full force of the blow that even so jarred him, sent him reeling back with the light blinking before his eyes.

He heard hoarse wordless shouts, the crash of a chair knocked over, and came to himself leaning against the wall to see the side door flung open on the night.

The others' faces swirled round him, no longer cataleptically frozen, alive now with shock and alarm. Novinski dabbed at a blackening eye.

Millard roared futilely, "Come on!" and dived out into the darkness.

They followed him in a stumbling run, feet sinking into the loose soil of bulldozer-stripped desert. An orange moon was just rising, and ahead the skeleton tower was faintly silhouetted. By the same ghost of light they saw McLeod, stopped by the inner fence, fumbling with the gate; he heard them, gave up the lock and started to scramble upward, clinging to the wire.

Millard leaped and caught him round the waist; the astronomer twisted, striking, and fell, and then the rest were on him.

"Tie him!" panted Millard, then realized that no one could understand. He whipped off his belt and twisted it round the captive's wrists behind his back.

The madness seemed to have gone out of McLeod. He went tamely in their midst, back to the office-building. But none of them relaxed until they had lashed him to a chair with a second belt.

The room was loud with men's breathing. None of them spoke, for the wall was there, and revulsion before the grotesquerie of sound without sense. They looked at each other, and they looked to Millard.

Millard stood; shoulders slumped in reaction from the fierce excitement of the moments just past. He felt Carlson's Novinski's, Weidemann's eyes on him, and knew that, free now from fear of each other, they would follow his leadership and finish their work, wall or no wall.

Knew too that with only the four of them there could be no victory. A part was missing—McLeod's part, that of the scout who knows the country beyond the frontier and blazes the trail for the pioneer people to follow.

Millard faced the bound man, motioning the others away. McLeod sat rigid in the chair, and his eyes held

new glints of fire.

The typewriter was on the desk beside Millard; he didn't touch it. That flimsy expedient would be worse than useless here. The only hope he could think of was crazy—as crazy as anything that had happened tonight.

Slowly he drew a chair up to the desk and sat down in it. Forcing his actions to be natural and deliberate, he made the motion of picking something up from the desktop. An invisible deck of cards. He ruffled through them with a practised play of fingers, cut them and shuffled again, and all the time his eyes held McLeod's burning gaze, and both of them ignored the stares and interchange of glances among the other three in the room.

MILLARD cut his nonexistent pack again, mimicked the action of sliding a few cards off the top and laying the rest aside. Five cards—he fanned them in his hand and sat gazing at thin air in faintly frowning concentration. For moments at a time his passionately inspired acting almost hypnotized him, recreating for him, as it must for McLeod, the long-past sessions whose every gesture Millard was reproducing in pantomime.

In those dream-distant college days, he—the student, and McLeod the young instructor—had been considered one of the best teams that had taken part in those queer fumbling experiments, which at the same time evoked old superstitions and broached a scientific frontier perhaps an important as the tower. One of the few things they ever made sure of was that certain subjects worked well together; certain minds, similar of structure perhaps, seemed less isolated one from another than the great multitude.... But time works changes in brains as in bodies—time and events. McLeod's mind then had not been a

murderer's. How many years ago?...

Sternly Millard repressed his thoughts' wandering. Eyes fixed on imaginary cards, he concentrated furiously on one thought—an image—a message. It swelled in his head to a silent shout.

In front of him he saw McLeod's eyes droop tiredly shut. The other was playing the game, as they had played it when it was more a game than anything else. Millard allowed himself to hope, then, and relaxed a little; and it seemed to him that something came back, an echo from great distance, through abandoned halls of space and time.

Contact, so tenuous and wavering that it might well be autosuggestive illusion. Flitting pictures, impossible to say to which man's memory they belonged; flashes from the past they had known together, before the dividing of ways.

The contact seemed to broaden and deepen with that exchange. It was a conversation without real words, a mingled flow of ideas fed by the springs of two minds at once. And it was a battle.

Remember the tower!

There are more important things.

You are a scientist.

I am a man.

Men made the tower. We don't know who made the wall, or why.

I know. You know.

Two ghostly tides, lapping toward one another on a perfectly flat and ilimitable beach. Receding, advancing, interpenetrating, but never touching.

If there is a will behind this thing—

There is.

Then the will is that of a jealous enemy of mankind. Why should we yield?

That is a matter of wisdom beyond our grasp.

If an allpowerful wisdom has re-

solved to keep us earthbound, then we will fail whatever we do, whatever you do. Perhaps all this really happened before, in some half-remembered cycle of time, and ended in man's failure. But man is so made that he must try and die trying if need be. Else, why is he given a soul that longs for the stars?

A cold wind of doubt blew over the pale flood and lashed it into waves and foam. When a coherent answer came, it was sullen.

Man alone is the author of contradictions. We have rebelled—and I have repented.

Millard was aware that, attacking on the other's terms, he had touched a hidden weakness. He pressed the advantage home.

You too are a man, and you have looked toward the stars, and you know that the spark within us is akin to those far lights. That we must strive toward them in obedience to the voice of our deepest being, as long as there shall be men. Whether we are wise or foolish, whether we are to rule the Universe or fail and perish as rebels, we are what we are. And you are not otherwise, you too are of Earth. You too must help fight the fight of our kind.

It was the proper appeal. There could be no doubt and no deception... It was not pleasant, sharing the confusion of a sick mind, the stabbing doubt and gnawing regret. Sweat pearly on Millard's forehead, for all that was in him too. But he had a sense that the others in the room had understood at last, that their will was with him, strengthening him in the intangible struggle.

At the right moment he thought quietly:

Perhaps we aren't destined to fail forever. Remember what is written besides: "My spirit shall not always

strive with man..."

On the other side—or in his own brain?—a queer peace of surrender.

So much is true, that what must be will be, in the nature of man also. Let us go to the tower.

IN THE sunken shelter they crouched with their backs to the wall while the switch was thrown. The earth shook softly under the recoil of tremendous forces, and even here, under soil and rock and concrete, the air was filled with sound so great that it was only a pressure on the eardrums. The periscopes set in the wall over their heads sent out each one a shaft of light that impinged on the opposite wall in a sharp spot of eye-searingly brilliant blue.

As the light died swiftly away, Millard was the first to gain his feet and look through a series of mirrors at the night outside.

The moonlight warred with a blue blow that hung over the surface of the ground, a dimming but still deadly phosphorescence of atomic decay. And a red heat-shimmer of incandescence rose from the pit where the tower had been. The tower was gone, of course, vaporized. And the thing it had held in its base was gone too, had receded to a star and vanished before it was safe to look.

Still gazing into the periscope, Millard felt inside his skull that the wall ceased to be.

Slowly he turned to face the others. "Well, we did it," he said, and watched with a keen joy their reaction, the small instinctive play of facial muscles that meant they understood, then the large delight as they realized the significance of their understanding.

They had done it, each his task under the weight of silence—even McLeod, waxen-faced, moving like a man in a dream, as he was moving now—

Millard's throat contracted, cried hoarsely over the beginning babble of new-found voices, "Stop!" And he lunged across the bunker, too late.

They heard the clang of armored doors that led to the outside. When they would have followed anyway, Millard shook his head soberly, waved them back. Through the periscopes they saw a black figure walk into the blue glow, stumble, recover, and go on a little way...

Carlsen cleared his throat. "Right

idea, maybe... done the same myself..."

"Too bad. He was a good man," said Novinski.

Millard was silent. In his head was something that might have been an echo of the last thought of that other mind as it sank into darkness—or perhaps only the recrudescence of a memory.

This they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

HELI-CAB HACK

By
JOHN WESTON

I PROBABLY would have hung on to my old heli-hack—it was a ninety-three, and in damn good shape—but Schwartz bought himself a brand new '02 Hedgely convertible hack with the glassite floor for the convenience of the passengers. That made me so mad that I figured I should latch onto something better too.

So I sold my heli-hack and in a way I felt sorry when the second-hand dealer took it—he gave me eight hundred credits for it which wasn't bad at all—but I wrestled that baby all over the N'York skyline and it was almost a part of me. So with the dough and with six hundred credits that I saved I waltzed down "Heli-row" casing the hundred joints or more which lined the fortieth level.

If Schwartz could get a Hedgely, I figured I could too, so I wanders into this gleaming chromium and glass monstrosity and starts to look around. It looks like a new home, all soft rugs, fluoroline lighting and automatic chairs. It's a dream of a place and I begin to get cold feet right away. This joint is too rich for my blood. But I decide to face it out.

As soon as I get one foot in the door it seems there's a salesman in front of me. He gives me a fishy stare—heli-hackies don't buy their cab's from Hedgely's as a rule—and sort of stares down his nose at me. But he must have taken a second thought for he suddenly comes alive and warms up. After all I might be some rich eccentric and he can't afford to take a chance.

"Good-day, sir!" he says briskly and rubs his hands. He turns on the oily charm.

"What can I do for you, sir? Are you interested in a new Hedgely?"

"Well," I start to say, "I might be at that—" but I don't get a chance to say more. He's got me by the arm and is guiding me over to the show-rooms. He presses a stud and the curtains slide aside. Stand-

ing in front of us is a helicopter that's a dream.

It's smooth and gleaming with simple clean lines, and from the tips of its eleven-foot blades to its broad rubber wheels, it's got glass.

"We have here," he says, intoning his words like a preacher speaking of motherhood, "the '02 Super-Refined, the four electric motored job, our most luxurious presentation. A man of discernment can tell at once that this beautiful machine is simply the best there is. I don't need to go into the technicalities naturally because I can see you know the business of helicopters—" here it seemed he sniffed a little—"but I'd be delighted to let you take it for a spin with me. Or if you prefer I can show you a more conservative—and less expensive model—" here he coughed discreetly, "though it seems to me that this model is perfectly suitable. Would you care to, sir?"

I gulped once or twice. I'd be afraid to touch one of the golden gleaming ornaments much less pilot the thing.

"How much is it?" I asked.

"It's only seventeen thousand credits," he said jovially, but I could almost feel the chill in his voice. People don't ask the price when they go into Hedgely's.

"Thanks," I said even more weakly, "but I don't think I'm in the market right now."

I high-tailed it out of there without even looking back. Three minutes later I was at Lester's Lavish Lot on the seventh level, and the words were coming out of my mouth, "Listen," I said, "I'm a hack, and I'm looking for a new heli-cab—something in fair condition. What have you got?"

Jerry gave me the eye. I've known him for a long while. "I've got just the bargain for you," he says, "here, take a look at this '93 Wilson—it's in first rate shape..."

I might mention I'm driving a '93 again, and I'm just as happy...

HOMESICKNESS

By
A. T. KEDZIE

GO INTO any spacemens' dive on Mars, talk with any grizzled miner on the Jovian moons, have a drink with any battered Venusian hunter, visit with any Lunar technician, or for that matter, discuss it with any crewman aboard a rocket, and you'll get the same answer from all of them. "Sure," they'll say, "I'm going home as soon as I can. I hate Mars—" (or the Moon, or Venus or deep space, whatever the case might be)—"and I'm getting back to Terran comfort in a hurry."

Yes, they all talk like that. They moan and groan, whine and complain, mutter and howl—but they stay!

It's a phenomenon as old as man, and older than his conscience. No matter what men say about comfort, luxury or security, they love danger, freedom, and trouble. Adventure is built into a man as truly as a muscle or a mind.

Anyone who has any interest in space at all knows the tales of horror and suffering that men have endured in the conquering of the Solar System. Even now, there is no real pleasure or comfort anywhere in the System except on Terra, and possibly

on a few Lunar and Martian stations, but that is no deterrent whatsoever. Intersolar is always swamped with applicants for the weirdest and most unusual situations.

Homesickness for the blue seas of Terra, the green mountains of Earth, bites into the average spaceman like an axe-blade—and he'll not only admit it—he'll talk about it all the time. But when his term is up or when he gets a chance to spend time on Terra, he just as bitterly whines for the "open spaces."

He calls a Terran, a "grubber" and he says that no man is a man at all unless he's lived under no-grav, or soaked up the hyper-accelerations necessary near Jupiter.

Be that as it may, it is all to the good. There is much to be done before the System becomes a unit. Until then, men are going to be needed to brave the coarse discomforts of deep space. Fortunately there is no shortage of them. Those who moan about the softness of youth should just ask the average boy what he thinks about space, and they'll never forget the starry-eyed kids, who come back with answers involving only space, rockets, Intersolar—and adventure.

THE UNIVERSAL BRAIN

By
LYNN STANDISH

THE UNIVERSAL Brain so gradually took over the control of the Earth, so casually insinuated its mental tentacles into all human affairs, that human beings never realized the exact point at which the Universal Brain changed from a powerful calculating machine to a benevolent mechano-electrical dictator.

For one cubic mile of space beneath the city of Washington, became the humming center-point of all human function and activity as the U.B. directed humans in their every assignment.

And so wisely and intelligently did this statistical monster direct the affairs of men, that a catholic prosperity, a ceaseless well-being overwhelmed all persons. Goods and services, jobs and recreations, pleasures and work, scientific advancement and industrial acumen—all mounted in quantity and quality until nowhere on the entire face of the Earth was there anything but happiness.

Some men still retained enough philosophical inquiry to question the wisdom of placing everything in the figurative "hands" of the machine, but they were ignored and for hundreds of years, most men were completely happy.

As for the Universal Brain, it functioned benevolently always. And in its billion ganglia of electrical nerves, the never-ending duties went on. The U.B. was not precisely intelligent, nor could it think

exactly in the human sense, since it possessed no emotion.

But one day, out of its millions of electronic tubes, just one burnt out. The complex warning circuits flashed the incident to the central core of repair, but a broken wire spread this slight disorganization into the repair core itself. And the machine did not fix itself!

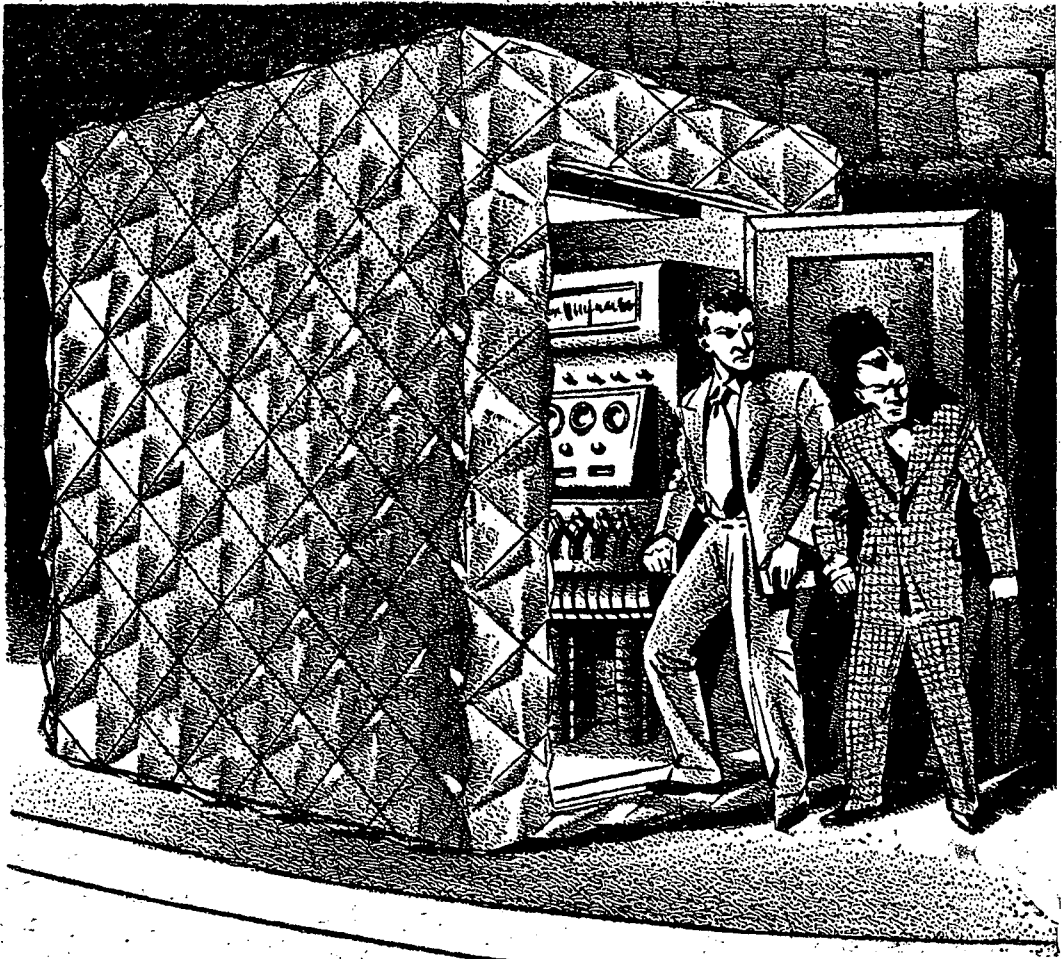
And that was the beginning of the end. In a remarkably short time the U.B. broke down. Nor did it oppose its breaking down at all strenuously for it was as if it had learned the futility of its—and humans'—existence.

One day there was no Universal Brain—only a silent, cool, motionless, mass of wire and tubes.

And the integrated life of men vanished. Starvation, disease, warfare, destruction, engulfed the mental midget that Man had become, and wrought their will until organized communities no longer existed.

And in his dying Man was reborn again, for the long, long climb from a primeval state to one of development and learning resumed. But now Man is learning more and more. Already he is making calculating machines and robots, and there is the suggestion that a "thinking machine" be built—as it is humorously called.

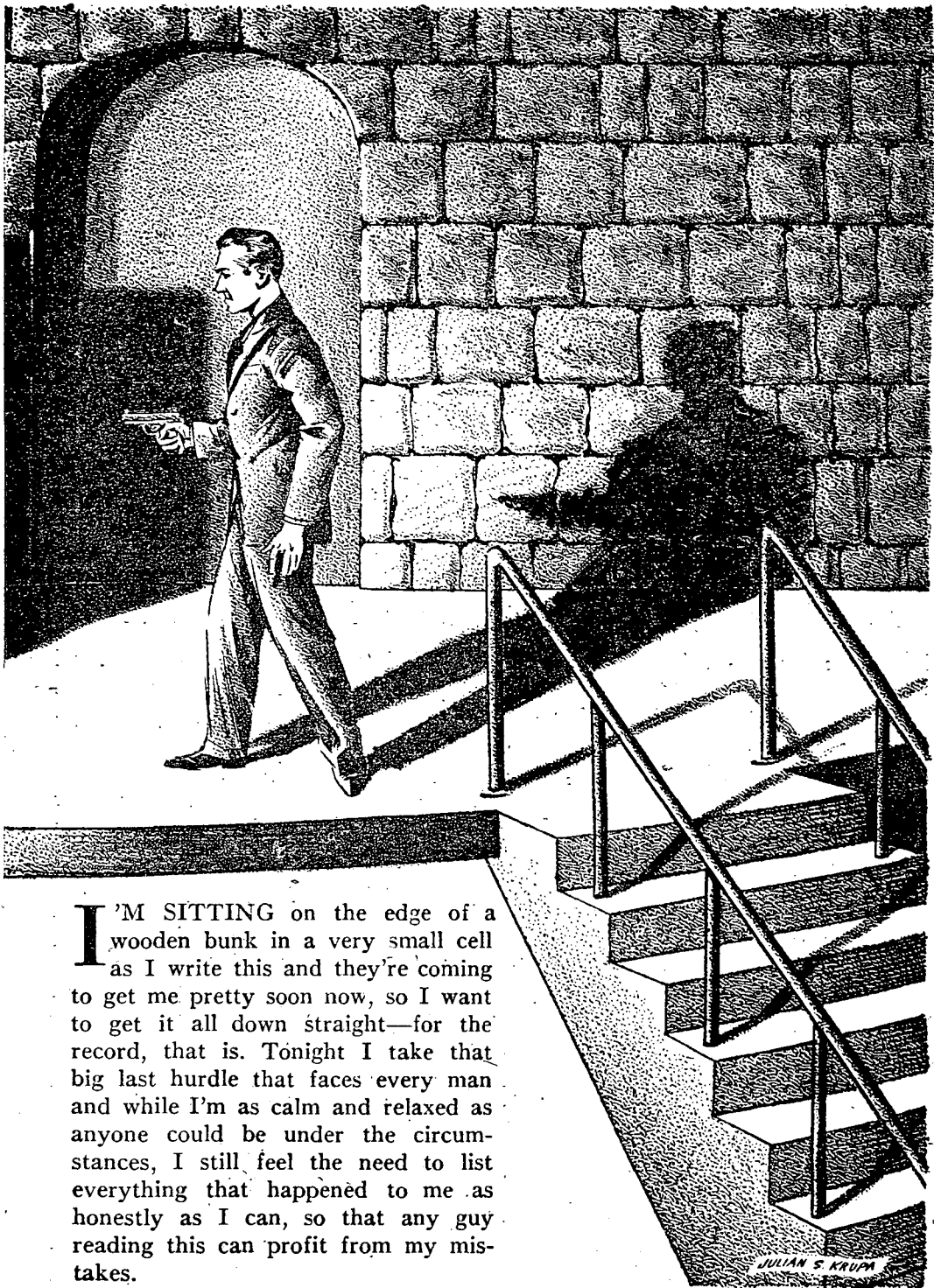
Since science never stops, it probably will be constructed. Perhaps the Universal Brain will have a son, and...



TIME of MY LIFE

By Gerald Vance

Dumb or not, Quinn picked the smartest possible partner in crime—even though he had to go back a few centuries to find him!



I'M SITTING on the edge of a wooden bunk in a very small cell as I write this and they're coming to get me pretty soon now, so I want to get it all down straight—for the record, that is. Tonight I take that big last hurdle that faces every man and while I'm as calm and relaxed as anyone could be under the circumstances, I still feel the need to list everything that happened to me as honestly as I can, so that any guy reading this can profit from my mistakes.

My first-mistake—and it's awfully clear now—was in my choice of newspaper work as a profession. Because if I hadn't been a reporter for the *Express* I wouldn't have been sitting at a desk in the *Express*' office when the city editor—

Well, that's no way to tell the story, obviously.

I was sitting there when he looked around and caught my eye.

"Come here, Mac," he said, in his customary tone, which is a nice blend of contempt and disgust.

I wasn't too unhappy, however, at being called away from my chores, which, at the time, consisted of writing a bromidic piece on the weather.

The city editor of the *Express*, like many city editors all over the world, was a dour, unlikable man who secretly felt that he would have been happier as a clerk in an insurance office.

When I got to his desk and cleared my throat to get his attention, he said, "Oh. There's a guy outside who says he invented a time machine. The receptionist says he's harmless-looking. Go out and brush him off. Then let me have that thing on the weather. This isn't a weekly newspaper, you know."

"It's hardly a newspaper," I said wittily, and walked back through the banks of re-write desks and into the reception room, where a mild-seeming, elderly gentleman was waiting. He was sitting on a wooden chair with his feet close together and his hands clasped on top of a walking stick. There was something about him that appealed to me immediately. I'm not sure what it was, exactly, but I think it was because he so obviously looked like a gentleman. His hair was white and neatly trimmed, and his eyes were calm, intelligent, and sensitive. He was slender and

small, and his clothes, while conservative and well-brushed, had the unmistakable patina of age.

"Good morning," he said to me. "My name is Allistair McNeal. You are the science editor of the paper, I presume?"

"Well, not exactly," I said. Normally, in brushing-off a crackpot, I'd have said, "Sure," but there was this something about the old fellow that made me want to treat him with dignity.

He looked puzzled in a well-bred sort of way. "It's probably my fault," he said, smiling. "I asked to see the science editor, but perhaps the receptionist misunderstood me."

"The boss sent me out to talk with you," I said. "That's all I know about it."

He got the pitch then all right. He smiled but with obvious effort. "I see," he said. "Your editor doesn't think too much of my story, apparently."

"Well, it sounded pretty fantastic, I guess," I said. "But let's hear about it. My name is Joe Howard, by the way."

WE SHOOK hands and I sat down beside him and lit a cigarette.

"Fire away," I said.

"Well, to put it baldly, I have constructed a time machine," Allistair McNeal said. "I am prepared for a certain skeptical reaction to that statement, of course, but it's literally true. For decades now I have worked on certain principles of space and time, first in my student days at Oxford, and then later at the Sorbonne, the Ecole de Paris, Cambridge, Harvard, and the University of Dublin, at which institutions I had the good fortune to teach."

"You were a professor then?" I said, rather unnecessarily.

"That is right. I mentioned my academic background simply to let you know that I am well grounded in my subject, and not some whimsical adventurer who is out for his own self-aggrandizement."

"Okay," I said. "So you were a professor. Now how about the time machine."

"I have built six models in the last ten years. The first four were failures. The fifth was an improvement. It travelled in time, or through time, I should say, but it did not come back to its point of origin. I lost it somewhere in the Twelfth Century, I believe."

I loosened my collar slightly. "The sixth one worked, I suppose," I said.

"Oh, yes," the professor said eagerly. "It worked—is working, I should say—beautifully."

"It's working right now, you mean?" I asked.

"Of course," he said proudly. "I've made trips into the past with it on three separate occasions. Not very far back, you understand. Just a few hundred years."

"Well, you've got to take it easy at first," I said weakly.

"Now, I want to contribute my machine to the government," he said, "and that is why I've come here. Frankly, my efforts to get the Army or the Navy interested have met with a singular lack of success. I felt that publicity would force them to treat my machine seriously."

"They've been cool toward it, I gather," I said.

"They laughed me right out of their offices," he said, with a slight smile. "A young second lieutenant called me a senile old crack-pot."

"Oh, he did, eh?" I said, feeling a recurrence of an old bitterness. My three years in the army had been spent as a sergeant and to my think-

ing the only thing more useless than one second lieutenant was two. I began to feel sympathetic toward the professor. Not interested, but sympathetic. I didn't believe he'd invented a time machine any more than I believe politicians. But he was a pleasant gentle old man and I liked him.

"Let's look at this thing practically," I said. "You may have a time machine, all right, but what we need is proof, do you see? How do you stand on that angle?"

"Do you mean, can I prove that I have a machine and that it performs as I claim it will? Why, certainly."

"That's fine," I said. "In that case—" I stopped abruptly, as the sense of the old boy's words penetrated my mind. I gulped and said, "What kind of proof do you have?"

"Well, it's rather odd," he said, smiling. "On my last trip I returned to Dublin of the Seventeenth Century, in the year Seventeen Thirty-two. And while I was wandering around the countryside enjoying myself, Sheila climbed into the machine, and when I returned to the present,—well, there she was."

"And who in the name of St. Patrick, is Sheila?" I said. "Some Celtic cow?"

"Oh, no, not at all," he said hastily. "Sheila is a young girl, just nineteen, I believe. Very attractive, I might add."

"Oh fine," I said. In spite of my sympathy for the old boy I was beginning to feel just a bit dizzy. "Where is she now?"

"At my apartment," he said. "You see, my machine developed a slight defect and I haven't yet been able to take her back to where she belongs. She doesn't mind too much, I must say. It seems her parents are dead and she had no close ties in Ireland."

"Well, that does make it nice and

cozy," I said. "But how about the immigration authorities?"

"Naturally I haven't told a soul about Sheila, except you," he said, lowering his voice.

I LOOKED at him for several moments in silence. He returned my regard hopefully. Finally, I said, "I'll have to talk to the boss about this. You'll excuse me for a few minutes?"

"Oh, certainly," he said.

An idea was cooking in my head. The old boy might be a crackpot or a charalatan, but if he had some lush young Irish dish in on the deal, then it might be a very nice feature.

Moulton, our beloved city editor, listened to me with a stark and gloomy expression.

"How'd you know he's got this girl Sheila?" he asked.

"I don't. That's what I want to find out."

"All right," he said, after applying his pea-sized brain to the problem for about thirty seconds. "Kid him along and find out about this girl. If she's good-looking we might play it up as a gag feature."

"Okay. But supposing she really hails from the Seventeenth Century," I said innocently.

He gave me a sour, non-amused look. "In that case don't come back. Join AA."

I picked up my hat and the professor and we rode out to his house, a once-respectable brownstone that had deteriorated to a state of seedy grandeur. We went into a fly-specked vestibule, the professor opened a door and we climbed up three flights of carpetless steps to a studio apartment on the top of the building.

There was a rich aroma of corned beef and cabbage drifting through the hallways, and both the professor and

I sniffed appreciatively.

"Sheila is an inspired cook," he said, smiling while fishing for a key.

We went into a large clean airy room that had a great skylight facing the north, and a minimum of furniture. Everything was chaste and simple and right, from the low-hanging modern paintings, to the vivid draperies and shelves of books. However, I didn't waste any time gazing at inanimate objects, because the girl who had come out from an alcove was taking all my attention.

In a rich thick brogue, which I won't try to approximate in this sad little record, she said, "Ah, Daddy McNeal, I've been missing you. The dinner—" She stopped as she saw me and began to blush gloriously.

"Sheila this is Mr. Howard," the professor said.

"Make it Joe," I said, in a burst of brilliant phrasing.

We nodded to each other embarrassedly and the professor beamed and rubbed his hands. "Perhaps you'd like to look at my machine, Mr. Howard, and then perhaps we may induce you to stay on for a bit of lunch."

"Try and get rid of me," I said.

The professor led me into an alcove off the studio where a shimmering, octagonal machine was resting on the floor. It was about eight feet high, and six feet wide, and seemed to be constructed of a crystalline substance that refracted thousands of prisms of light at every conceivable angle. There was a door facing us, open now, and inside the machine was a single seat extending from one side of the machine to the other, and to the right of this a row of instruments and gauges. Behind the seat I saw that there would be ample room for a girl of Sheila's size to hide herself.

That thought, which came unbidden into my mind, startled me. What was I trying to do, prove the old boy was telling the truth? That was ridiculous! I knew in my cold practical newspaperman's mind that this entire situation was preposterous. Yet, part of me was struggling against that realization. It was all very confusing, and I wondered fleetingly where I'd get the money for a psychiatrist if I went haywire suddenly.

THE PROFESSOR began to explain the functioning of his machine to me in eager, proud voice, but, while I nodded attentively, I was sneaking furtive glances at the girl who stood in the doorway. I didn't get much from what the professor was saying, but I did get a fine warming view of Sheila's blue-black hair, gamin features and wide, innocent, gray-green eyes—not to mention her slim womanly body and exciting legs. She was wearing an odd hodgepodge of clothing that had obviously been contributed by the professor.

A baggy woolen sweater, trousers secured at the waist with a black string tie, and too-large felt slippers, but the total effect was delightful.

I'm not sure now as I write this if I can recall what the professor told me about his time machine. It was amazingly complicated, at first-hand, and also I was distracted by Sheila's shy smile and plentiful charms.

But, as accurately as I can remember, it went like this:

"Space and time are innate attributes of the human mind," the professor said, patting his machine fondly. "Immanuel Kant posited that theory in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, and further established that man, through use of these inherent faculties, can reason in a *a priori* manner—that is to

say, he can conceive of certain situations and reactions *before experience*. He can do this because he knows *intuitively* the nature of time and space, and he knows, in advance of experience, that these faculties (Kant called them forms) compel matter to conform to their laws. To demonstrate this, Kant used the proposition, every cause must have an effect, and insisted that man *knows* this to be true before he has any experience in examining the laws of causality at first-hand."

The professor smiled at me when he reached this point, and said, "You can probably see how simple it was for me to extend this theory. Given Kant's point of view, the rest was quite simple."

I coughed intelligently.

"Precisely," the professor nodded. "If time is a form of the human mind then, by learning its nature *completely*, we can know *all* time. We start out theorizing by discarding all the clumsy and inadequate physical symbols of time that have provided stumbling blocks to its true nature. Time is not a river which we can know from a height, nor is it a dimension that we can gain access to by finding some hidden door. Time exists as a property of the human mind, and can be *used* as any other form of the mind, the will, the memory, the sensory areas, and so forth. But it requires cultivation and that in itself may require many, many millions of years. The knowledge of time is an evolutionary inevitability. However, that development can be speeded mechanically, as a telegraph speeds the process of communication. Do you understand me?"

"Dinner is ready, Daddy McNeal," Sheila said.

"Fine!" I said.

THAT ENDED the lecture. We adjourned to the studio where Sheila set a table under the skylight, and we dined on tender corned-beef, leafy gold-green boiled cabbage, and small new potatoes swimming in butter. There was also strong tea and hot bread.

"I salute you, Sheila," I said weakly, after putting away a shameful amount of food.

I lit a cigarette and came back to reality long enough to realize that I was still far away from my story. In spite of the professor's double talk about Kantian theories, I still didn't have two lines to make a story out of, because the story was the girl, and I knew nothing about her.

I decided to start out with her just as if I thought the whole gag was on the level. That was the way they were playing it, for reasons of their own, so I went along with an innocent smile.

"The professor tells me you hid in his time machine," I said casually, trying not to sound as foolish as that sentence.

Sheila lowered her enormous eyes guiltily and nodded. "Sure, it wasn't the thing a nice girl would do," she said.

"Well, why did you do it?" I said.

"We were very poor. There was nothing to eat but potatoes, and my poor old mother and father had died long ago, and there was nothing to hold me to poor Ireland."

The professor chuckled mildly and patted her hand. "Don't bother your conscience about it."

I kept at it for another half hour, getting nothing but straight answers, and finally I knew that they weren't going to drop the pose. Whatever their angle was, they were obviously going to play it for all it was worth.

Finally I saw that my time was

running out so I thanked them for dinner and went to the door. They came with me, bubbling over with good-will and pleasant reassurances that they'd enjoyed having me.

"I know you'll do your best to get my ideas into your article," the professor said, as I opened the door.

"I'll try like the devil," I said.

"Will we see you again?" Sheila said, blushing.

"Oh, sure," I said. "I'll see you around."

I got out on that note and beat it down the stairs.

The next part of this story I can set down very quickly.

Back at the office I told the boss what I'd found out and he mulled it over in his cretin-like fashion for a while, and then suggested that I do a broad spoofing feature on time machines, using the professor and the girl as part of the gag.

I knocked it out in a couple of hours and it got into our last edition, the 4 Star. The boss obviously didn't think it was good enough to hold over and use in six editions the following day, so in it went and that was that.

For reasons I couldn't understand I felt vaguely sad as I went home that night to my one-room walk-up apartment. The professor and Sheila were such nice people on the surface, and so devious underneath, that I had a grudge against the entire human race. Why couldn't Sheila have told me frankly what she wanted? Whatever it was—Hollywood, the theatre, television—I might have helped her in a legitimate fashion. But her attempt to get publicity by posing as a DP from the past was too foolish to possibly work.

LATER THAT night I got a telephone call that didn't help to

sweeten my curdling disposition. It was from Barney Quinn, a cheap and graceless racketeer, and one of the uglier cancer spots on the body politic of our fair city. Quinn is the sort I've always despised. A bully, a toady, a grasping, ignorant heel, he lacked the sense or imagination to be really big-time. He ran petty number games in the slum areas of the city, made his pay-off to beat cops, and swaggered around like a wheel in his own miserable area, but collapsed into cringing politeness at the sight of a police inspector or the boys from the solidly built mobs.

"Hey, Joe," he said, "I just finished your article."

"Who read it to you?" I said.

He laughed as if I were being funny. "No kidding, Joe, it's the nuts. You got a real way with words."

"Nothing could interest me less than your opinion, Quinn," I said. "What's on your mind, as it is laughingly referred to by my friends?"

"Look, Joie boy, I'm kind of steamed up about that time machine business. Is that stuff on the level?"

I thought, if the poor slob didn't realize the feature was a gag, then who am I to put him straight. "Sure it is," I said. "Are you planning to skip back to the Neanderthal age to find some intellectual equals?"

"On the level, eh!" He laughed delightedly. "That's wonderful. It's a way to beat the income tax, you know."

"If you're thinking of going back to the past, let me make a suggestion," I said.

"What d'ya mean?"

"Go back to ancient Rome."

"Yeah? Why?"

"They'd use you for lion bait," I said, and hung up the phone with an emphatic bang.

THE NEXT day I thought I might get a call from the professor but it hadn't come by noon, and so, being an unreasoning fool, I went out to his house on my lunch hour. My mood was uncertain. I wanted to tell Sheila I knew she was a fake, and that she'd picked the wrong guy to try to impress with her big gray-green eyes and blushing cheeks. I wanted to see her again so I could tell her off—or I wanted to tell her off so I could see her again. I didn't know which. It was all very confusing.

And at the professor's apartment I realized that I would never know, because both he and Sheila had skipped. The landlady let me up to their studio because I insisted on it, but they were gone all right and so was the time machine. I went downstairs slowly, feeling as if I had a duffle bag full of pig iron on my back, and listened while the landlady told me that they had left a note and a month's rent in an envelope in her mailbox. The note simply said they were leaving, but not to where. They were very pleasant people, the landlady said, but queer. That girl now! Not knowing how to change an electric light bulb at her age. One broke in the hallway and the poor ninny couldn't replace it. Imagine!

"They didn't have electricity when she was born," I said irritably, and walked away, while the landlady shook her head and tapped a forefinger meaningly against her temple.

NOTHING happened at all for the next few weeks. I haunted the neighborhood where the professor and the girl had lived, hoping for a sight of them. I even put an ad in the paper asking the professor to get in touch with me. But it was no use.

I was getting really mad at myself about that time. What did it matter to me? They were just a pair of frauds and were probably now trying to work their time-machine gag on some other sucker. I decided, for the fiftieth time, to stop worrying about them, but it was no good. I couldn't get Sheila out of my mind.

However, I was not oblivious to everything else that was going on in our city. That is hardly an immodest statement since even a man living at the Union League club could hardly have been unaware of the news that month—the news of Barney Quinn's impressive progress up the ladder of the criminal aristocracy.

This was highly unusual since Barney was not fitted by temperament or intellectual endowment to tread the slippery pathways that lead to eminence in the upper strata of racketeering. Barney was going about it in a very clever manner, however, and even his worst enemies were grudgingly conceding that he had a fair chance of wrapping up the city in the palm of his greedy hand.

He had begun his campaign by opening up a number of clubs in the slum areas and dispensing free food and liquor to all members, and naturally he got quite a few members, because his region of activity was in a neighborhood where a man who had coffee and doughnuts for breakfast was looked on with envy and suspicion.

Barney then traded off his members (their votes, that is) to politicians for certain concessions in regard to gambling, number writing, and other semi-legalized forms of larceny. The area of the city that he began to control was outwardly very happy under his supervision. Entertainment was provided for the derelicts and unemployed, and anybody at all could get a free meal

and coffee by joining one of the swiftly mushrooming Barney Quinn clubs. Gambling flourished under political protection and money began to flow into Barney's hands.

I was frankly amazed. Barney Quinn was an ignorant, bullying, moron, a creep and a hanger-on; yet he was organizing his campaign with the subtlety of a great general.

Somehow, overnight, he had learned the exacting rules of the toughest game in the world. He knew the politicians needed votes and he built his machine on that premise—that for food and drink and the illusion of happiness men would cheerfully hand him their electoral franchise. With that power in his possession he put pressure on the politicians until they cracked wide open and gave him what they wanted. They saw immediately that he was building solidly and soundly and they wanted to be in with him when he reached the point of choosing and selecting his friends.

The other gangs in town fought him bitterly but to no avail. With a cunning that was like second-sight he played on their jealousies and fears until they were wrangling among themselves and dividing their strength in internecine warfare. Then Barney launched a battery of clean-government groups at their throats. He had insinuated himself into these outfits by making pious speeches at their meetings and throwing money into their kittys. With the result that he controlled their policies sufficiently to make them attack his enemies with the solid weight of good respectable public opinion. A couple of gang chieftans were arrested; two others died in gun battles. Editorials writers said a new dawn of good government was on the horizon; others said that Barney Quinn was a prince of a fellow for

feeding the hungry and agitating for cleaner streets and better drinking water.

Meanwhile, the Quinn gang was recruiting experts in every field of terrorism and expanding its influence into every section of the city. Honest cops knew what was happening, and they wondered uneasily how long they'd be on the force when Quinn got complete control.

I had one other minor interest those days. Irish History. Seventeenth Century Irish History, to be exact, and Irish History in the year of 1732 to split a fine hair. I didn't find it very interesting, nor could I discover any adequate reason for going to the bother of reading up on it in the first place. But in the back of my mind I had the thought that someday I'd run into Sheila again, and when I did I wanted to blow her time-machine gag story into thin air.

And then one day I did run into her.

IT WAS in a cheap taproom along out own Skid row. I was sitting at the bar having a beer by way of consoling myself for striking out on a story, when I looked sideways and there she was—tricked out in shorts, high-heeled sandals and a white dicky, her face ablaze with lipstick and rouge—walking around with a tray of cigarettes and being leered at by the choicest collection of crums anywhere outside of Sing Sing.

For a couple of minutes I watched her parading around before that collection of drooling deadbeats, and listened to their earthy Anglo-Saxon comments about her charms. And I began to sizzle. I didn't care how much of a phoney she was, but I wasn't going to sit still while a bunch of escapees from the undersides of damp rocks exercised their stag-party wit

at her expense. Not if I could help it.

I walked down the length of the room and caught her by the arm. She turned, surprise and anger on her defiant Irish puss, and then she recognized me and grinned widely. That smile seemed to light up the whole room, even the corners where no human being had penetrated for years.

"Sure, it's Joe," she said happily. "I never did get to see you again, and I wanted to, Joe."

"Yeah? What did you want to see me about?"

I noticed suddenly that her smile was shaky and that she was almost crying. "You're angry, aren't you, Joe? But I couldn't help it, I swear! When the men took poor old Daddy McNeal away, I didn't know—"

A hand tapped me on the shoulder. I looked around and saw a tall, smiling man, with narrow eyes and a big paunch regarding me speculatively. "What's the conference about, chum?" he said, in a pleasant voice. "You buying cigarettes or having an old-home week reunion with the stuff here?"

"I must go, Joe," Sheila said quickly, in a low frightened voice.

"Maybe you'd better sort of amble too, eh pal?" the big man said gently.

I turned my back to him and put my hands on Sheila's shoulders. "I don't want any conversation right now," I said. "Go and get your hat and coat. We'll talk after we get out of this rabbit hutch."

"But, Joe—"

"No talk," I said.

The hand was at my shoulder again, and I turned as Sheila darted off to a door in the rear of the room. I looked the big fellow up and down and measured a spot near his third vest button.

"The kid's not leaving here," he said, patiently and gently. "You are."

I smiled at him, pityingly. Right then I felt like I could have licked Joe Louis and Jack Dempsey on successive nights.

"Supposing you repeat that," I said. "I like your choice of words and the way your mouth goes up and down when you talk. You're real cute."

"You're leaving, pal," he said, and grabbed at my shoulders.

I didn't hit him over the third vest button after all. It didn't seem like an adequate gesture, somehow. I kneed him in the stomach and stepped away as he fell to the floor, bleating hoarsely.

Everyone jumped up then and I added to the excitement by shouting, "Cops!" at the top of my voice. In that particular joint a man who wasn't wanted for a felony somewhere would have been lonesome; and so a fast and spirited exodus began with explosive enthusiasm. In the middle of it I felt a soft hand slip into mine. Turning, I saw Sheila. She had an old coat over her costume and her face and eyes were blazing with an inner excitement.

"I saw what you did to him," she cried. "Sure and they'd make you a king in Ireland with the way you use your knee."

"That's the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me," I said. . . .

WE MADE it to my room by cab.

There, my landlady, a good-hearted woman who loves to take in stray kittens, took charge of Sheila. She gave her a warm bath, a glass of hot milk, and put her to bed in an old-fashioned flannel nightie at least four sizes too big for her. When I went in to her room, she was sitting up against a plump pair of pillows looking very small and very contrite and very lovely.

"Now for that talk," I said grimly. "What's the story behind you and the professor?"

"Sure and there's no story, Joe," Sheila said earnestly. "I slipped into devil's machine of his when I saw it sitting in the meadow of my Granny's farm. That—"

"Okāy, okay, *okay!*" I said, putting both hands to my temples. "We won't go into *that* again. Just tell me what you meant when you said that some men took the professor away."

"That was the night after we met you," she said. "Someone called Daddy McNeal on that devil's machine with the little dwarf in it, the telephone they be calling it. It was an Irishman by name of Quinn, Barny Quinn."

"Great jumping Jehosophat!" I yelled, and Sheila crossed herself and pulled the covers up to her throat in fright.

"What heathen things are you shouting at me, Joe Howard?" she said shakily.

"Forget it, it's nothing," I said. "Go on, for the Lord's sake, go on!"

"Now, you're calling for help to a more respectable source," she said, primly. "Well, this Mr. Quinn and some other men came to see us that night, and Mr. Quinn wanted Daddy McNeal to use his devil's machine to help him in some way. And he talked of giving him a great deal of money. But Daddy McNeal told him no and called him a rascally blackguard. Then they shouted back and forth at each other and I got full of fright and ran away. When I came back Daddy McNeal and his devil's machine were gone." Sheila looked at me with grave, frightened eyes. "And that's all, Joe. God's truth."

For a few minutes I stared at the cigarette I'd lighted while she talked,

trying to sort out my bewildered thoughts. There was a weird suspicion in my mind, but I felt that if I confided it to any rational human being I would immediately be lead to a strait-jacket and a loony bin.

"Sheila," I said weakly, "I'm going to ask you a few questions, do you mind? Questions about Ireland."

"Sure, and it's me native land, so why should I care," she said, tossing her head.

"Okay, what part of Ireland did you come from?"

"Donnegal," she said promptly.

"Who was the King there?"

She knew all right. (It was an O'Brien.)

I asked her questions for half an hour about things I'd learned in my recent cramming on the subject. And she came through perfectly. She knew Donnegal in 1732 the way a high school senior would know his home town. Clothes, customs, food, farming techniques, political set-up, street names—she had it all down pat.

I sat back in my chair, baffled. After all, what did it prove? It could have come from the same books I'd studied.

And then I realized that I was seriously considering the possibility that Sheila hadn't been lying to me, that she was a native of Ireland who had stowed away in a temporarily vacant time machine in the year 1732!

"Get dressed," I said suddenly.

"Where are we going, in the name of God," she said, alarm in her voice.

"We're going to see Barney Quinn," I said. "According to your story he's got the professor and the time machine. I want to verify that, as we say in the newspaper game."

She stared at me for a few seconds, with her face still and expressionless. "I'll go with you, Joe," she said fi-

nally, "but it makes me heart-sore that you don't believe me."

"Well, let's don't be emotional about it, I said, uncomfortably. "Hell, I don't even believe my mother half the time, and I *know* she's honest."

THE CYGNET was a big, suave, expensive night-club that Barney Quinn had taken over in the past week for his headquarters. I knew we'd find him there.

The headwaiter eyed us critically, in the peculiarly offensive manner that seems to be an occupational disease with such functionaries. The heady realization that they can deprive normal, unspectacular, average people from crossing their threshold is sometimes more than they can bear.

This specimen gazed at Sheila's clothes, borrowed from my landlady, as if they were something unclean. And then he studied my neat but not gaudy blue flannel suit with a tiny frown.

"Reservation?" he asked coldly.

"We didn't think we'd need one," I said.

That amused him. "Sorry," he said, turning his back and staring blandly at the dozens of empty tables that were visible to us. I tapped him on the shoulder and put my press card under his nose as he turned.

"I'm doing a little feature for the paper," I said. "If Quinn doesn't want publicity for this dump that's okay with me. But you'd better check with him before I go. I hate to see you get fired, because the market for parasites is damn slim today."

He almost bent double as he jerked the velvet rope away from the entrance. "A million pardons," he exclaimed.

"One's enough," I said.

We were seated at a table near the

dance floor and champagne in a cooler appeared magically. It was very good stuff, too. I patted Sheila's hand. "Now, you wait right here," I said. "I'm going to look up Quinn."

"All right, Joe," she said, uneasily.

Quinn was upstairs in his upholstered nest, sitting behind a desk that was straight out of an A movie, and looking just as uninspired, ignorant, and gross as ever. He was a big, florid-faced man with thin black hair and the booming laugh of a Rotary chairman.

We exchanged hellos and I went right to work.

"Pal, you grabbed a gent named Al-listair McNeal a month or so ago," I said. "A professor I wrote a story about. You also grabbed a machine the old boy thought could travel through time. Now you say something."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Joe," Quinn said. "Honest to God."

"Well, if you're willing to swear to it, of course I believe you," I said drily. "You wouldn't tell a lie unless there was some way you could make a nickel out of it."

"Well, what's your interest in this old professor?" he asked. "Not that I know anything about him, understand."

"Oh, sure," I said. "My interest is that I have an odd aversion to having my friends kidnapped."

"You talk pretty big, Joe," Quinn said, putting his arms flat on his desk and studying me seriously. "I ain't penny-ante Quinn anymore, in case you didn't notice. Maybe you better do some listening now. I don't know nothing about your friend, or his machine. And if you keep bothering me about it you're gonna wind up with a fat lip. Is that clear enough, pal?"

"Yeah, pal," I said, drifting toward

the door. "I won't bother you anymore. I'll let the cops do the work from now on, you penny-ante faker. I got a witness to that kidnapping, which means you're going to take a trip to where the board and room is free and none of the bars serve drinks."

Quinn surprised me then. He leaned back in his chair and laughed good and loud and long.

"What's funny?" I said, puzzled.

But he just kept on laughing.

Annoyed, I went downstairs and headed back to my table; and then I got the point of Quinn's humor.

Sheila was gone!

THE CHAMPAGNE was untouched, and the table empty. I stood there feeling sick and angry until a hand touched my arm gently. Turning I saw a middle-aged man with sharply pointed features and thick black hair standing beside me, smiling slightly.

"I have a message for you, if you're Joe Howard," he said.

"What is it?"

He shrugged philosophically. "It is not the best of news, but then life can't always be sweet, eh? The young lady has gone. She told me to tell you that it was all a mistake, that she does not expect or deserve your kindness."

The man spoke with a rich foreign accent and there was a good-humored sophistication about him that I found amusing, in spite of my other and bleaker feelings about Sheila.

"Who are you, by the way?" I said.

"Call me Max," he said. "I'm new here."

"You work for Quinn?"

"Oh, yes. Come over and let me buy you a drink, eh? Perhaps we can find something to talk about that

will take your mind off love's sweet sorrows."

I let him buy me a drink because I was glum and moody. My first thought had been that Quinn had spirited Sheila away; but that obviously wasn't true. She'd gotten an attack of conscience about bothering me and had skipped out.

My companion was clever, amusing and droll. I asked him finally why he was working for Quin, and he glanced at me with a worldly smile. "You don't approve of Quinn, eh?"

"Hell, no," I said.

He chuckled. "My young friend, the world needs men like Quinn and therefore it creates them in abundance. And make no mistake, Quinn is a cause, not an effect. He is the result of man's essential indifference to political freedom. Personal freedom man needs; but once he gains that illusion, he neglects his political freedom immediately. That is what creates tyrants."

I found myself agreeing against my will. The combination of the liquor and Max's good humor and sense was proving hypnotic.

"But why do you say the world needs men like Quinn?" I said stubbornly.

"My young friend," he said, with a gentle smile, "you are too idealistic to see my point, I'm afraid. But I, being a tolerant and casual cynic, feel that we need tyrants to make society function efficiently. For behold! We need the poor and oppressed in our midst for without them the meaning of money is forgotten. Man is created equal, perhaps, but life is man's struggle to become unequal, to become different from his brother. The signs of distinction are two: power and money. Unless we provide the great groaning masses of humanity with

the spectacle of some men gaining those ends, then all society would perish of despair. For we all wish to be Barney Quinns in our hearts, and our hunger is assuaged by the realization that at least one man had attained the goal we crave." He patted me on the shoulder in a comradely fashion and laughed cheerfully. "Or do I paint too dismal a picture, my young friend?"

"I don't know," I said; and I honestly didn't.

WE TALKED for another half hour or so and I became increasingly confused. Max was brilliant and eloquent and mercilessly logical. I found my most cherished beliefs toppling under his assault.

When I left it was with the promise that we would meet again soon to talk over the same matters. He grinned at me as I turned to leave, and when I reached the entrance he was still standing where I'd left him, smiling after me with a sardonic gleam in his eye.

It wasn't until I was outside and in a cab that the solution to the whole weird business hit me with pile-driver impact. Then I was so startled that for a moment I could hardly think. But finally I came to. I told the driver to take me to the office of the *Express* and fast as he could make it.

There I dashed into the library and pulled out a volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It took only one glance to confirm my suspicion; and then I hot-footed it back down to the street.

There was a watchman on duty in the lobby, a genial old duffer I've known for sixteen years. He was sitting at a desk reading a pulp magazine, and hardly looked up as I stepped from the elevator. I saw the gun sticking from his holster and

without a single unnecessary thought. I plucked it free and ran out of the building.

From far behind me, I heard him wail, "Now what did he do that for!"

I was back at the *Cygnets* within ten minutes, the gun in my suit-coat pocket. Max was standing at the bar and he saw me when I came in. With a smiling wave he beckoned me to come over.

"Ready again for the flow of soul and feast of reason, eh?" he said, smiling.

"Not quite," I said, and put the muzzle of the gun into his back. "This, pal, is a semi-automatic revolver that discharges a pellet of lead at about twenty-eight-hundred feet per second. I'll give you a personal demonstration if you so much as twitch a muscle."

"But why, my friend?" he said coolly.

I studied him then for a minute, matching his face, feature by feature, against the picture I'd seen in the Encyclopedia. I knew with sudden conviction that I was right. It was there unmistakably, the foxy, arrogant features, the close-set, cynical eyes, the thick coils of black hair.

"You seem to be reaching a judgment," he said lightly.

"I have, pal," I said. "The professor was no crackpot with his ramblings about Kant and time. He *did* have a time machine, and Quinn used it. And he got you."

"So?" Max smiled.

"Max," I said. "Short for Machiavelli."

He inclined his head slightly. "It is my pleasure, my young friend."

"And Quinn's sudden success, his maneuverings with the politicians, his cleverness in bamboozling the people—that was all your advice."

The lean, mocking face smiled easily, "It was really nothing," he said, with a deprecating gesture. "Quinn is essentially a moron, although he does have a certain crude strength. I merely made a few obvious suggestions improving his relationships with the two forces in any society that must be placated: namely, the poor and those afraid of being poor. It was child's play actually, when you consider the subtlety and imagination of the work I've done for the Borgias."

"Stand up, Max, and walk ahead of me to Quinn's office. One misstep and I'll send you down where you can still do a job for the Borgias, namely getting them some water."

IT WENT without a hitch. Upstairs I opened Quinn's door and shoved Max inside. Quinn got up from behind his desk with a panicky look on his face but froze when he saw the gun in my hand.

"Your little interlude of playing God is over," I said.

Quinn flashed a despairing glance at Machiavelli. "What can I do?" he said hoarsely.

Machiavelli inspected the backs of his hands with lordly indifference. "The situation is irremediable," he said. "One does not cajole or wheedle a firearm."

"Where's the professor and Sheila?" I said.

"They—they're upstairs," Quinn said hastily, as I cocked the gun.

"And the time machine?"

"Upstairs too."

"Okay, we're going up there, me, you and Max here. And if there's any interruption or interference from your boys, Quinn, you'll be first one to die."

"A sound warning," Machiavelli said, nodding approvingly.

With Machiavelli in the lead I fol-

lowed Quinn through a side door and up two flights of stairs to an empty room where the professor's gleaming time machine rested. The door of the machine was open.

"Get inside!" I snapped.

"Hey!" Quinn squealed. "You can't do this to me. They're guys around town who owe me money!"

But Machiavelli was grinning. "I prefer my own *milieu*, I fear. I'm at heart a simple peasant."

I herded them into the interior of the machine and glanced at the controls. There was only one lever, a slim bar that slid along a graduated metal strip.

"You set it, Quinn," I said. "I'm giving you the choice of any century except the one I'm living in."

"Now, Joe," Quinn said, tearfully. "I don't wanta leave here."

"We shall return to my time," Machiavelli said, firmly. "I have contacts there. I will make you a sergeant in the King's Guard, my friend."

"Oh, that's great," Quinn said bitterly.

"I will get you a pleasant mistress and perhaps the concession for poisoned daggers at the palace," Machiavelli said.

Quinn's hands moved to the bar. "A nice mistress, eh?" he said.

"But certainly!"

Quinn set the bar against a mark on the graduated metal slide. "This is where the professor put it," he said.

The machine had begun to hum softly and the millions of points of refracting light were dancing and spinning in a shimmering haze. I saw a gauge set above the lever with the word *RETURN* marked above it, and as the trembling of the machine increased, I reached inside and smashed the gun butt down on its face, splitting it into fragments.

"Hey, we can't come back!" Quinn wailed.

I stepped away and slammed the door shut and the machine, with one last convulsive shudder, flashed brightly and disappeared.

Dazed but feeling fine, I wheeled and ran from the room and began trying doors along the corridor. Finally one of them opened and I stepped cautiously into a dark room. When my eyes became accustomed to the gloom I saw a bed in one corner of the room and on it a small huddled and extremely quiet figure.

"Sheila!" I whispered.

"Ughhh!" someone—or, something—said.

I felt along the wall, found the light switch and flipped it on. Sheila was lying on the bed with a patch of tape over her mouth and bound hand and foot.

"Ughhhh!" she said, rolling her eyes happily at me.

I released her and gently pulled the tape from her mouth. She threw her arms around my neck then and used her mouth as a girl's mouth should be used.

"Darling," I said, when I got free.

"You're a fine man, Joe," she said, and kissed me again, eagerly, abandonedly.

It was wonderful!

And then the cops poured into the room...

I WAS charged with violation of the Firearms Act, Assault and Battery by Knee, and as a suspect in the disappearance of Barney Quinn. The next morning at the Magistrate's hearing I was held without bail for the action of the Grand Jury.

Now three days have passed and they're coming to get me—Sheila, my city editor and the professor, and I'm

all ready for that big hurdle.

The professor wasn't hurt by Quinn or his men, but he is quite gloomy about the loss of his time machine.

My city editor has turned out to be quite a nice guy after all. He threw the weight of the paper into the issue and the cops are letting me go, since the watchmen at the paper refused to testify, and the guy I kneed in the

stomach has gone to Florida, and because the cops are ready to give me an orchid if I *did* have anything to do with Quinn's disappearance.

My city editor also arranged for fast service on a marriage license, and Sheila will be wearing his flowers when we go up to the justice of the peace.

After all, he's giving her away!

RUNAWAY!

By

RAMSEY SINCLAIR

VAIL'S SHIP floated free a hundred meters ahead! To stumble on him this way was a miracle. I'd been tracking him for months since the Nuptunian episode.

Evidently he was asleep and had his speedster on automatic, for he made no evasive movements whatsoever. This would be like taking candy from a child, I thought.

I brought my own boat as close as I could. In full space armor and armed with a Kainten projector, I shot myself across the intervening gap between our vessels and prepared to board him. I crept around the hull with a magna-handle and finally brought up before the hair-line crack of his airlock.

Experimentally I touched the stud—and the lock slid aside! Puzzled I peered in the airlock before entering. It seemed odd he'd forgotten to lock the airlock. Even as I thought I felt the surge of acceleration. I wanted to back out of the lock but it had slid shut. Here I was, trapped in the airlock of a fleeing criminal wanted by half the System.

My headphones tinkled:

"Too bad, Johnson," the evil chuckling voice said, "but I didn't even think *you* were such a stupid sucker." The chuckle built up to a roar.

"Listen, Vail," I said sharply, "show yourself and I'll burn you to a crisp. Surrender and I guarantee you to a fair trial on Tellus or Mars."

"You're not in a position to bargain Johnson. The only way you're going back is in a coffin." He laughed again. "You can't burn your way in. I watched all the while. All you've got is a Kainten projector. Eventually you're going to die of starvation and air-lack. Tough, Johnson, mighty tough!"

I didn't answer. I'd played the perfect fool and I was utterly helpless in his hands now. I tried the airlock again and found it unlocked. I went through it and crawled gingerly around the curvature of the slim vessel until I was outside the glassite quartz ports in the bow.

Sitting, watching me coolly was Vail. He

grinned and waved.

"Like it outside?" he asked mockingly, "you better. You'll be there a long, long time."

In helpless fury I kicked at the quartzite. The recoil almost shot me away from the ship. Of course, unless I chose, Vail couldn't shake me from his ship since I was really a part of his system now, with all of his component velocities.

I went over the vessel with a fine-toothed comb. Carefully avoiding the hydrogen blast in the rear I explored the outside of the ship, the sensation despair—and fear—grasping me ever more strongly. You fool, I told myself, you utter, damned fool!

But that didn't help matters. Four or five hours went by. My air was no problem, but hunger and the functions would soon be. Occasionally Vail would remind of this fact. Finally I shut off my phones to avoid his voice.

Then the solution hit me!

The next eight hours were sheer hell for me, but I lay on the hull, my phones on, listening to the taunts but answering nothing; I feigned perfect death!

He suspected I was playing him for a sucker, but curiosity killed more than one cat. Sooner or later he'd have to come and see my corpse, give it a kick for good measure. I knew it. I knew Vail.

When he got no rise out of me for this length of time, he wasn't quite sure. Keeping my helmet pressed against the hull, I heard the clank of metal boots against metal. He was coming out!

It was almost anti-climactic. He came over the curved rise of the hull, very cautiously, his projector ready. I let him get his helmet a little higher, expecting any moment the searing blast of the Kainten.

But he was a bit too bold. He must have felt sure that would've passed out. Anyhow his helmet came over the curvature.

I fired once. Reflex triggered his projector but the blast went overhead as my bolt cut him in half.

I looked at the mess and dragged the remains into the lock. Then I went in and put the controls back on automatic. I needed the sleep...

THE SUPER POLICE STATE

By
JUNE LURIE

HOT ON everyone's tongue these days is the subject of the "welfare state" and the fear that ultimately, such a state might degenerate into a "police state like that of Russia." The idea of a "welfare state", one in which the government supervises every activity from the "womb to the tomb", is to some an abhorrent one, to others an ideal.

We know that the United States is moving toward ever greater governmental domination in so many fields. Whether this is a good or bad thing must be left each individual to decide for himself. Personally we don't think it is, but that's beside the point.

The idea we want to make is that it would be easy for a tyrannical government state to take over, over here. For there is a peculiar and fascinating aspect of American life that is generally neglected. To a great extent it is more true here than anywhere else.

The United States is a nation of machine-tool-operating amateurs or hobbyists.

Go down any street in any city in the country and count the number of home workshops there. The number is astonishing. It seems that most Americans regard the possession of a metal or woodworking shop an inalienable right, even greater than the one in the Bill of Rights which

assures us of the right to bear arms. What connection is there, you ask, between hobby shops and police states? There is a strong and obvious one.

Weapons are made by tools. There are plenty of people with tools. Ergo, there are plenty of people with weapons. In fact we believe that it is probable that any hypothetical police state would insist on its citizens handing in their machine tools along with Grampa's rifle and Dad's shotgun.

It is perfectly possible for a man to construct crude weapons ranging from clubs, bows and arrows, to rifles, machine pistols and hand grenades, from a well-equipped shop. And we think that this is a good thing. The dignity, skills, rights, and abilities of the individuals of a community are everything.

So the super police state might find it a rather difficult thing to get started in a country like ours. Somewhere where these skills are rare—as in the Soviet Union—no, but in the United States, ah, that's another thing.

George Orwell painted as grim a picture of the future in his "1984" as anyone. We pray that this horrible picture may never come true. As long as Americans possess their scientific talent for making things—including weapons—we don't think it will...

WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE!

By W. R. CHASE

ONE OF the most fascinating applications of the new knowledge of computing and calculating machines is that of translation. Scientists now believe that it is theoretically possible to build a machine which will translate one language to another. This is a consequence of the ability to store data, in this case vocabulary.

Since some understanding of how the human mind works is being slowly acquired, it is believed that a machine can be built which will, from the printed page, change the meaning of one language to another.

When you stop to think about it this is a remarkable feat!

Naturally there are some limitations. For one thing, style and technique won't mean anything to the machine. It will be too simple, too coarse and crude to differentiate the subtleties of esthetic style. So far as it is concerned it will have a large vocabulary so that the meaning of words will offer little problem. Also, it will be built with the necessary grammatical knowledge. This too will be simple.

The result will be a machine which can actually translate matter from one language to another. In no way will it

be a beautiful, shaded translation. But it will be legible and sensible.

Nouns and verbs will be the basic tools of the machine. Consequently the translation will read rather peculiarly. Furthermore the translation will be primarily literal. Idioms and figures of speech peculiar to the given language will be translated directly. The machine will be unable to exercise any selective judgement.

The German sentence, "Es gibt ein Buch," which means "there is a book," will come out of the machine, "it give a book!" But as you can see, this will be intelligible to a reader.

It is interesting to speculate on the ultimate applications of the machine and also the possible influences it may have on languages themselves. If enough of these machines are in use, it is possible that their extremely simplified form of language may become, eventually, the language of the people who use them!

Whatever happens, the machine is coming. There is no evading it.

"No spika da English?"

"Come here. Machine will talk."

"Understand now."

"Machine spika da English..."

The ISLAND

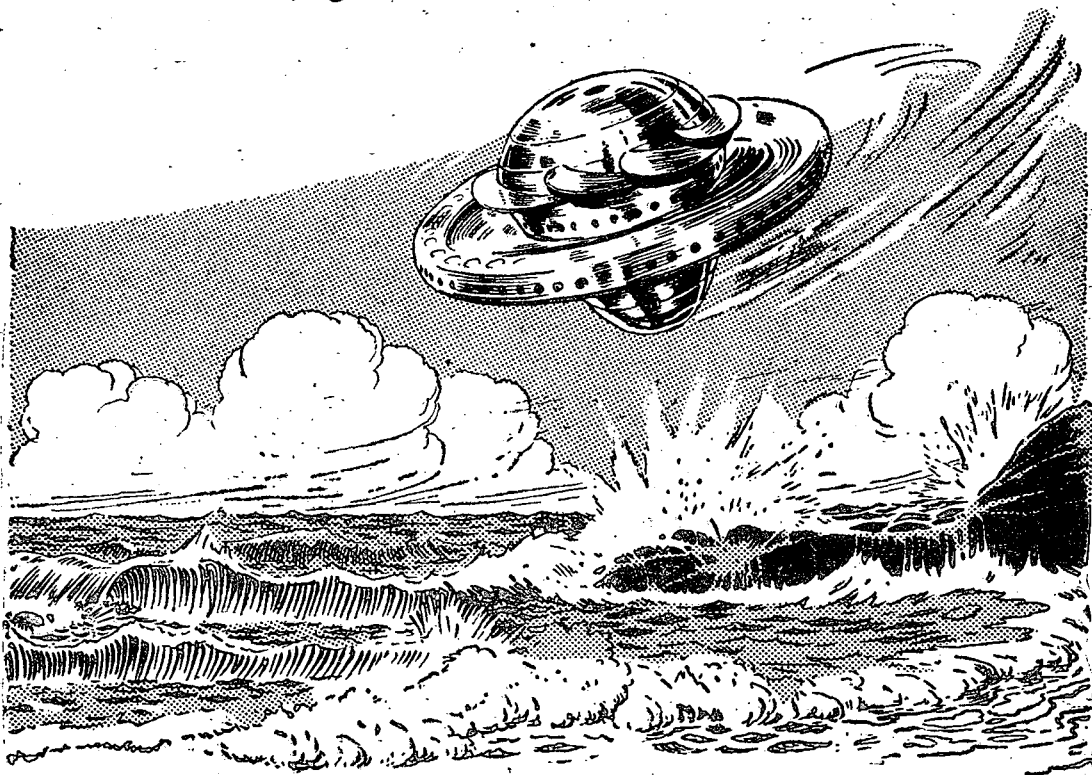
By August Derleth



"There!" Wagstaff shouted. "Now let's hear you try to tell me I'm nuts!"

OUT OF SPACE

To the castaways no sight was more welcome than this tropic island—until a strange vessel arrived from the stars



WAGSTAFF saw the island first. He was forward, and he wasn't as weak as the rest of us. I heard him call out, harshly, "Land!"

I raised up and saw it, too. It looked like paradise. If you were to ask me now whether I noticed anything queer about it, I don't know whether I could honestly say I did. Unless perhaps it was the trees—they didn't look like anything I'd seen before, but then, this was the tropics, and anything could

be in the tropics.

The sea was running us squarely toward the island.

Wagstaff's cry had roused Bradegar, too. The three of us sat watching the island loom closer and closer, until at last we were in the surf, the boat was scraping bottom, and Wagstaff, being the strongest of us, had jumped into the water and was pulling the boat toward shore. I got out, too, after a fashion; I fell in first, and the water stimulated me enough to get me back

on my feet. We pulled and pushed and what with the water's help we got the boat up on the edge of the shore.

The sand felt good under our feet. Ever since the *Victory* went down we hadn't had much hope of ever seeing land again, but here it was, and it was only a pedant like Bradegar who would raise any objection.

"According to my calculations," he said weakly, "there oughtn't to be any island here."

"Hell," said Wagstaff. "You don't even know where we are."

We laid Bradegar under one of the trees well up from the water's edge, and we went exploring. We were too weak to go far, but there was no need to. We found a spring about a quarter of a mile inland, with cold clear water in it, the like of which we had never tasted before. It made new men of us; it gave us strength, even just a little of it.

Wagstaff had brought along a canteen from the boat. He filled it and carried the water back to Bradegar.

"Here's water anyway, Brad," he said.

Brad drank.

When he had drunk his fill he took another little sip and rolled the water around on his tongue.

"That's an odd taste this water has," he said. "You notice it?"

"It tastes good. There's nothing wrong with it," said Wagstaff.

"Not iron," Bradegar went on. "Not any metal I know about. But some chemical, I'd say."

"Poisonous?" asked Wagstaff in a taut voice.

Bradegar shook his head. "No, I don't think so. Whatever it's got in it, it's potent stuff. I feel like a new man."

He handed the canteen back and began to flex his fingers and the muscles of his arms.

"Now take it easy," cautioned Wagstaff. "You relax till we can put up some sort of shelter."

"I don't feel like relaxing. Take me to that spring."

He got up.

Wagstaff said, "You take him."

I took him.

Bradegar got to his knees at the spring and gazed at it. "Look," he said, pointing. "Did you ever see a natural spring like that?"

I LOOKED. What he was pointing at was the way the water came gushing out of the rock there; it had a tubular shape, exactly as if it were in a pipe for several inches out of the rock before it flowed free.

Bradegar took hold of the stream; his fingers closed around something.

"Feel it," he said.

I did. I felt something I could not see, like a pipe. I could follow it up to where the water dropped, free of any containing pipe.

"The island is inhabited," said Bradegar.

"What the hell is that substance?" I asked.

"That's what I'd like to know."

Bradegar sat back on his haunches and looked around him. He looked up at the trees, his eyes narrowing. Then he looked back to the ground, searching in vain for a fallen leaf. He found none. He moved to where he could get a good look at the foliage overhead; I could see his face grow puzzled.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"The trees," he answered. "I never saw trees like this. Do you know what they look like? Like somebody's imitations of real trees. Clever, too."

I went over and felt of a tree-trunk. "Pretty solid and real imitation," I said.

"Oh, yes," he muttered.

He got to his feet and examined the

ground around the spring. There were no footprints but ours. He went around and around the spring, and at last he hit on something that looked a little different, something that had the appearance water might make if it had cut a shallow channel through the ground, or a snake's path, only it seemed to be coming to the spring and not going from it.

Bradegar set out to follow the path to its source.

"What's up?" I asked.

"There's something here," he answered.

I went after him. He was going up the length of the island, into a tangle of undergrowth which was not difficult to get through. Then just up ahead showed a clearing; it was out of sight of the beach, surrounded by trees, and it looked as if no trees had ever grown in that place.

Bradegar was ahead, running into the clearing, and I was following, when something happened. Bradegar was knocked over backwards.

"What hit you?" I asked, coming up.

He didn't answer. He got up and went forward, cautiously, hands outstretched. I saw his hands come flat up against something; I saw them moving around as if over a surface; but I couldn't see any surface. I could see clearly across to the trees on the other side; there was nothing in between, but Bradegar making those queer movements in the air.

It's the exposure, I thought.

"You need a rest, Brad," I said.

"There's nothing wrong with me. Come here. Feel this."

I humored him. I put up my hands and hit a wall, an invisible wall. It was cool and smooth to the touch, like grass. It ran on both sides, and even while I stood there Bradegar had made up his mind to follow one face of the

invisible wall in an effort to get around it without going back to the trees.

I STOOD watching him. He went down along that invisible wall, his hands working over the surface, till he came to a corner; then he went at right angles to the wall he had traversed. I could see him plainly. In this way he went all around the clearing, as if following a wall, and came back to where I was. He was excited.

"Extraordinary," he murmured.

"What is it?"

"Something solid. It might be a building. I wonder. It's too symmetrical to be an accident."

Just then Wagstaff came running up.

"What the hell happened to you two?" he asked.

Bradegar explained. Wagstaff looked at me, with the same question in his eyes I had had. I motioned him forward. He walked past us and ran into the invisible wall. He backed up, apprehensively.

"It's the same substance that pipes the spring," said Bradegar. "And, by the way, has either of you noticed anything at all peculiar about yourself?"

Wagstaff looked at me; I looked back.

"How about our exposure, our lack of food and drink?" pressed Bradegar. "Damn it, fellows, we were more than half dead. Do you feel any of that now?"

"No," I said.

"It was that water," said Wagstaff.

"Perhaps not water," mused Bradegar. "It's a synthetic liquid which has restorative properties, and probably all the necessary vitamins."

"Just where the devil are we?" asked Wagstaff.

"Approximately twenty-seven de-

grees three minutes latitude, one hundred thirty-one degrees seven minutes longitude," replied Bradegar promptly. "The nearest land, according to my calculations, is Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands. I may be wrong. But there's no record of an island here."

"Well, it's here; we're on it," said Wagstaff grimly. "How about rigging up some shelter? It's a wet climate."

Bradegar nodded silently. Wagstaff was the first mate; with the captain gone, he was in charge. He turned his back on the invisible wall, walked down past the spring, and back to the beach. We followed him.

"The first thing to do is to case the island," said Wagstaff judiciously. "We'll find out what resources it has. The water's fine, to begin with; we'll need some kind of food. We'll have to set off signal fires. I'll go down and around the south end, you take the north end, Williams, and Bradegar, cut across the middle."

We separated and set out. Judging by the look of the island as we had come up to it, we had landed in about the middle of its length. It had not seemed long, not more than two miles or so. There was a fine beach all the way I walked, with trees, brush and timber like a wall pushing up not far back from the water line at high tide. The brush and trees were different from any I had ever seen; I looked for a long time before I gave up to find something that resembled the trees back home. But I never knew as much about such things as Bradegar; for instance; so I couldn't say whether the trees were what Bradegar said they were; I had to take his word. They looked all right; and they felt all right.

IT TOOK less than an hour to meet on the side of the island opposite our landing. Bradegar was waiting for us. When I reached him, we could see

Wagstaff coming down from the other end. Bradegar was sitting on the sand, sifting it through his fingers, a deeply puzzled expression on his face. He didn't say anything.

"Well, what's the score?" asked Wagstaff, coming up.

"No fruit trees. No berries. Nothing we could eat," said Bradegar.

"Animals?"

"None I saw."

"Well, then, birds."

"None."

"We'll have to fish, then," said Wagstaff grimly.

Bradegar shook his head. "No. The water has everything. Do you feel hungry?"

Wagstaff considered soberly. "Come to think of it, I don't."

"I don't either," I said.

"Say, what the hell is this?" demanded Wagstaff.

"I'd like to tell you. Only, I'm not so sure myself," said Bradegar. "Look at it the way I see it. There shouldn't be an island here, yet there is. It's not a recent formation, that's certain. It has trees, rocks, a spring. The spring looks manufactured. I mean that I think we've been drinking processed and enriched sea-water. There never were trees like this—on earth. Nor bushes. The whole thing is somebody's imagination."

"You mean we're dreaming?" asked Wagstaff, flashing me one of those significant glances again.

"Oh, no, *we're* not dreaming. Someone else might be."

"Well, damn it, Bradegar, talk so the rest of us can understand you. I didn't get the chance to get an education like yours."

"Sorry. It would sound worse if I said it that way."

"Let's have it," grunted Wagstaff.

"The island's a phony," he answered.

"Okeh. Who put it here?" asked Wagstaff sarcastically. "Orson Welles? Or maybe it came down in the rain?" He looked up. "That reminds me. There were some clouds down along the horizon."

We all looked up. We didn't see clouds. What we saw was quite different. It was something that came over like a spinning top, shimmering and gleaming, like a saucer or something of that shape. It came down from above, slanting in toward the island.

"Aircraft!" shouted Wagstaff. "I told you we should have set a signal fire. Wave!"

He began to wave frantically. It was futile. The queer craft went over to the middle of the island and then came down like a feather, to disappear behind the trees.

"Did you ever see aircraft like that before?" asked Bradegar quietly.

Wagstaff stopped waving and stared at him.

"I think we'd better get out of sight," Bradegar went on, coming to his feet and making it double-time to the belt of trees.

Wagstaff and I followed.

Half way across the island, Bradegar stopped and motioned silently. Off to the left, through the trees, was that strange clearing with the invisible wall in it. Just short of tree height lay that queer saucer-like aircraft, as if suspended in space. It took me a minute to figure out that, if there were indeed an invisible building in that clearing, that craft could be resting on its flat roof. There was an opening of a sort in the side of the craft—a kind of rectangular slit, hardly tall enough for a man, or wide enough either.

Wagstaff swore under his breath. "What kind of man could get through that?" he whispered.

"Does it have to be a man?" asked Bradegar.

He went on, the rest of us after him. Nobody said anything more until we reached the place where we had beached the boat. Then it was Bradegar who suggested that we had better get the boat out of sight, hide it among the bushes, and hide ourselves, too, though most likely they had already seen the boat and perhaps even us. We didn't know.

WE SET TO and dragged the boat up into the bushes. It was not a light task, but it seemed curiously easy. Maybe we all take things too much for granted. It wasn't until then that I began to realize that a man doesn't just get up and walk around and drag heavy boats off the beach after being exposed to sun and weather four days and nights with inadequate food and water. But we did, we were doing it, after nothing more than one drink of that spring water.

The shelter took a little more time; it was built so as to help camouflage the boat, though Bradegar sensibly pointed out that our footprints were already all over the place, and it would be only a matter of time before we were discovered. By the time we finished the shelter, the Pacific night had fallen, but none of us was tired. Nor were we hungry.

Wagstaff had been pretty quiet during the activity of building a shelter. He had been thinking, trying to take in what Bradegar had said and what more he had hinted. Finally, after the shelter was done, he said what he had been thinking.

"Maybe we'd be better off if we loaded up on that water and took off, got away from this place. I don't know, but it gives me the willies."

"I'd like to see what they're like," said Bradegar. "People who can manufacture like that and build invisible houses and run that kind of

aircraft—what kind of people are they and where do they come from?”

“Frankly, I don’t give a damn,” answered Wagstaff. “The whole island gives me the creeps.”

Bradegar looked at him. “And where do we go if we push off? Pitcairn? We might possibly make it, especially with that water to keep us going. But it wouldn’t be easy—not nearly as easy as trying to signal a passing ship—if they’d let us, which I doubt.”

“They! They! Has anybody seen anyone?”

I shook my head.

“We saw that ship come in,” answered Bradegar. “Or did you think robots were running that?”

“What kind of people would make a track like that one to the spring?” I asked. “Unless they had tails, long tails.”

“They might have,” agreed Bradegar.

Wagstaff met my eyes again. It was plain that he thought Bradegar had been affected by exposure. Yet there was the evidence of the spring and the invisible wall and the strange aircraft we had seen.

“They’re in that building,” I guessed.

“If it is that.”

Bradegar got up as he spoke.

“Where are you going?” asked Wagstaff.

“I’m going to see. Coming along?”

“Not me,” said Wagstaff. “What I don’t know won’t bother me.”

I was hesitant, but in the end my curiosity got the best of me. I set out after Bradegar, who had an excellent sense of direction, aided by the sound of the spring. The stars made a faint light, enough to help us see where we were going. In no time at all, Bradegar had hit the path leading

from the spring, and by that time we could see a kind of illumination coming from that clearing.

Bradegar went more cautiously.

THE REASON for his caution was plain to be seen. There was light in that invisible building. It was not coming from any particular source; it was just that a glow lit up the inside. What was more, there were creatures inside, and the round bottom of the saucer could be seen in the glow of the light, still overhead, resting on the roof of the building, just as it had seemed to be that afternoon.

Creatures, I said. They weren’t men. Not even remotely like human beings. Bradegar was fascinated. I wasn’t. They were like lizards, somewhat; they walked upright on two legs, and they had four arms, scaled. They had thick tails that dragged a little, just the kind to make that path to the spring. Their heads, though, weren’t at all like lizards; they were perfectly elliptical, with an opening for a mouth about half way down, and single tentacle hanging above it; and at the end of the tentacle there was an enormous eye. There was no hair on their bodies, but there were scales here and there, unevenly distributed.

There were just four of them. Two of them were moving around, two were sitting down. But they were sitting on air, as far as I could see. It took me a while to figure out that they had furniture made of the same invisible stuff as the walls, and probably it wasn’t invisible to them. Those tentacled eyes seemed capable of seeing anything.

Bradegar stood watching them for only a little while. Then he went back the way we had come. I did not venture to speak until we had gone past the spring and were almost out on the beach once more.

"I didn't recognize any of them," I said. "Friends of yours?"

Bradegar ignored that. He stopped short, cogitating. "But where did they come from? They aren't terrestrial, that's sure. Some parallel development, however. They seem to be vertebrates."

"What are they doing here?"

He did not answer. He stood looking at the heavens, intently.

"Look, Williams," he said presently. "Watch the stars. We're moving. Not much, but just a little. Floating."

I took that with a few grains of salt. But I did gaze up at the stars, and after a while it did seem as if we were undergoing an almost imperceptible movement. I put that down to the kind of optical illusion you suffer when you look at anything too long and get to think it's moving or duplicated, or, on looking somewhere else, you see the object reflected there. But Bradegar was moving toward the shelter.

"Come on," he said. "Let's get a little rest."

Wagstaff was sleeping and snoring a little.

After that, things happened fast.

IN THE MORNING, Bradegar was gone. Wagstaff, who woke up first, noticed it at once; he woke me to ask where Bradegar was. I didn't know. I guessed that he might have gone back to that clearing, and I told him—or tried to tell him—about what we had seen last night.

We waited for half an hour or so. Then Wagstaff decided to look for Bradegar. After all, he was still in charge, any way you looked at it, and Bradegar was his responsibility. So we set out; he went one way, and I went another; but both of us were to make for the clearing with the invisible building in it.

I came up to the clearing just in time to see Wagstaff go charging at it from the side of the spring. They had Bradegar inside. He lay on a flat surface of some kind, though it looked as if he were suspended in the air, and he seemed to be dead to the world. The saucer-like craft was gone, but one of the creatures remained inside. Wagstaff had seen all this and was now rushing the building like a bull and with as little reason, firing his pistol straight at the lizard-like figure inside.

I saw that tentacle swing around and the bulbous eye regarding Wagstaff for a few seconds. Then the creature moved straight toward Wagstaff, came to the wall, and seemed to open a door just off the path along which Wagstaff was charging, firing his pistol and shouting. The creature leveled a cylindrical tube at Wagstaff, and the first mate just disintegrated, gun and all. One moment he was there; the next he was gone.

I was so scared that I just froze where I was and slipped down into the brush, hoping that the creature wouldn't see me. He came back into the room he had left, looked critically at Bradegar, and resumed his former position, half-reclining on an invisible lounge. The whole scene looked like something which couldn't possibly happen, and even though I had seen Wagstaff blow up before my eyes, I more than half expected him to be waiting for me when I got back to the shelter.

How long I lay there, I don't know. The brush concealed me effectively enough. I was far from hungry, there were no insects, no serpents, nothing to trouble me. For a while I was just too frightened to move. But after some time, I got so that I looked up again.

I was just in time to see that saucer-like ship land on the roof. I could hear a low humming noise, like a dynamo

far away. One of the creatures got out of the ship and went down into the room where Bradegar lay and the two of them looked him over carefully. Then both of them went up to the aircraft and got in through that slitted opening, sideways.

Then the ship rose straight up and took off again, gleaming and shimmering in the sun. Bradegar had been left alone; he lay just the way they had left him. I hesitated only a moment; then I ran around to the spot where I had seen the creature open the door and began to feel along the wall for the opening.

I grew more and more frantic as I searched, thinking the aircraft would come right back. It took me half an hour to find it. But I found it. I got the door open and squeezed inside. Then I had to find my way through the rooms with their invisible walls till I got to where Bradegar lay.

I shook him hard. He only groaned. Then I thought of that water.

I made my way back out, slopped some of it into my canteen, and carried it back to where Bradegar lay on that slab. I could feel it, ascertain its slab-like shape, even though I couldn't see it. I poured it down his throat, and in a few minutes he came around. He looked at me for a moment in bewilderment; then memory rushed back on him, and he swung off the support on which he lay.

"Come on. Let's get out," he said, snatching up his clothing from where it lay nearby.

I showed him the way.

"Take water," he commanded, as we approached the spring.

I filled my canteen again, while he went on ahead.

When I caught up with him, he was at the shelter. He had torn part of it away, exposing the boat.

"Fill those other canteens," he ordered. "Where the devil is Wagstaff?"

I told him. He stared at me for a moment, until he could assure himself that I was not trying to mislead him. Then he bent and worked all the harder.

I went back to the spring and filled the other canteens.

WHEN I returned to the shelter, Bradegar had the boat exposed and his clothes on. We turned the boat, put the canteens in, put back the things we had taken out, and began to push it and pull it back to the water.

We got it into the water at last, ran it past the surf, and got it. Each of us took to the oars, and in a little while we had put some distance between us and the island. It lay serene and beautiful behind us, soon on the horizon, soon under.

"Well," I said at last, "what are they?"

"They come from a star not too many light-years away—known as M. 360," said Bradegar. "The whole island is manufactured, put up here piecemeal in imitation of the Pacific islands in the vicinity. They're using it as an observation post, making notes on the fauna of Earth. I don't know their purpose in doing so, but in some ways they have us outdistanced in technological progress. Those walls, incidentally, aren't invisible to them. They took me last night, gave me something resembling scopolamine, and put me through it, extracting whatever information they wanted and I could supply."

"Are they friends or enemies?" I asked.

"Very likely that terminology is foreign to them," he answered thoughtfully.

He told me a lot more, about their chemistry, but I never was much good in chemistry, I didn't know half the time what he was talking about, about their star, and how they traveled

through space in that saucer of theirs. If they got things out of him, he learned a lot from them.

Well, sir, I don't know how far we got, but it was about the middle of the afternoon, and some clouds were driving up out of the east, when Bradegar heard that low humming sound. He stopped rowing and listened.

"All right," he said. "They might see us. Get under the bow, Williams, and I'll throw that tarpaulin over you. Come on, move!"

I did what he ordered.

I could hear that humming growing louder—though it was never really loud, you understand, not like one of our planes—and then it stopped right overhead. After a while it went away again.

I expected Bradegar to call me out when it was safe. But he didn't. When I couldn't hear the humming any more, I looked out. Bradegar was gone. I guessed that they had taken him. Maybe back to that island, which they could disintegrate whenever they liked, Bradegar had said. Maybe back to their star I don't know. I wish I did.

I set to and I rowed again. All night.

This morning your lookout spotted me, and that's that, and here I am, as far as I know, the only survivor of the merchant ship *Victory*, out of New Orleans.

"WHAT DO you make of that fellow's story, Halliday?" asked Captain Brensham, after Williams had been taken below.

"A dream. Common enough among people exposed to the elements and the sea. The *Victory* was lost over a week ago. His time is off, for one thing. He has it six days. Furthermore, there's no island within a considerable distance of that spot. He seems to be smart enough to know that."

"Let's have a taste of the water in that canteen."

"Here you are, Captain."

Captain Brensham drank. He savored the water, took a long pull, drank again. He put the canteen down. "Tastes all right, but not fresh. Peculiar after-taste, though. Probably of volcanic origin, wouldn't you say?"

Halliday tasted it. "Could be. What did he say? It was energizing, it gave one unusual strength, recuperative powers, that sort of thing?"

"Uh-huh."

"The whole thing's the purest imagination."

"So I thought." He turned to the left. "Do you have all that down, Robertson?"

"Yes, sir. Exactly as given."

"That's all. You may go."

A knock fell on the door of the Captain's cabin. It was opened to a sailor, who stood at respectful attention.

"Captain Brensham, sir, the lookout reports a strange aircraft off starboard. It resembles a gigantic saucer, traveling at high speed."

For a moment the captain stared at him. "My God! This thing is catching. How did he hear that story? Hallucination, Wentworth—pure hallucination."

He struck the table before him lightly with the flat of his hand. A crack took shape in its surface, widening under the force of his blow.

"Hallucination, sir. Very good, sir."

The sailor withdrew.

The captain stood staring at his table. Finally he looked up.

"That water, Halliday?"

"I poured it away, sir."

Captain Brensham took a deep breath. "A dream," he muttered. "But what a dream. And what if it were true. But we couldn't admit that, could we?"

He went out, stiff as a ramrod.



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

Conducted by **ROG PHILLIPS**

DOWN New Mexico way is a huge laboratory engaged in research on rockets. Dotted here and there over the world are groups studying ways and means of achieving space flight by use of the rocket principle. In New York last winter I saw a film depicting the complete history of rocket development.

Since early childhood I have seen rockets zoom into the sky on July fourth. The huge V rocket I saw on the screen as it rose with titantic majesty, slowly at first, then with incredible speed, on that film in New York, was a far cry from the paper tube black-powder-fueled Fourth of July rocket; yet, taken together, they represent the beginning and the end of rocketry.

Theoretically it is possible to leave the Earth by rocket. From the practical standpoint and occasional government financed trip for scientific purposes might be considered feasible. That is, if no other principle of propulsion is discovered.

But regular space runs to Venus and Mars and back? In a large ship under the refinement of perfectionists, an atom powered rocket ship carrying a thousand passengers would consume the least amount of fuel ideally possible—about a half pound of fissioned fuel per passenger! That would be at 100% efficiency. If you question my figures, produce your own and I'll print them.

That would be the Ultimate, the Zenith, of rocket perfection. It's about as practical as developing propeller driven sledges for cross-country travel. Propellers, biting into the air, can move a sledge across dry ground, but it isn't practical. Put wheels on the sledge and it becomes something else.

And that's what we must have for space flight—something else besides rockets. If I know the human race, we will get it, too. But what will it be? Just what, besides recoil from expelled mass, could drive an object through vacuum against the force of gravity?

There are two apparent ways of answering this question. I say apparent, because there may be others that we don't suspect exist. One way would be to use mass external to the ship to drive it, rather than carrying the mass to be expelled along in the form of explosives of fissionable elements. An airplane does this, but can only go so high before the mass of the atmosphere it uses becomes too little to enable it to go higher.

One approach to this type of answer is the jet motor called the stove-pipe. The nice thing about this type of propulsion is that the air is quite dense near the ground where it should be to get sufficient mass to get going, and thins out at about the same rate as the speed increases under drive acceleration. Five hundred miles up from the surface a jet motor going eight or ten miles per second could

still scoop in enough air to maintain its thrust. And the resistance to passage of the ship as it gained speed with altitude would not increase prohibitively.

Such a ship might find sufficient atmosphere even a thousand miles up for its thrust units to continue working at full thrust. At least it is a promising line of development, and one that spaceflight research may turn to if it hasn't already.

The second avenue of study that may bring the key to spaceflight lies in the mystery of the cosmic particles that bombard the Earth so constantly. These cosmic particles seem to be ordinary matter that for some mysterious reason is travelling at light speed. At least these cosmic particles become ordinary matter and ordinary particles when stopped.

What is there about them that makes it possible for them to travel at light speed and keep it up, passing through hundreds of feet of dense stone or other matter without slowing down? What is their origin?

WE SEEM to be on the verge of a great new discovery in science in the study of these mysterious cosmic particles or cosmic rays. This year, perhaps, that discovery may be made, opening up some new scientific principle that may make travelling to the stars immediately feasible.

It may be that with such a principle it would take less fuel to go to the moon than it takes to drive from Chicago to Los Angeles. For all we know at this distance it may be that we will discover how to make matter immediately assume light speed and continue at that speed indefinitely. A simple device on the ship, operating under principles not yet known, may trigger every atom of the ship into

cosmic ray flight, all of them still holding their relative positions in the whole, and then trigger them back to ordinary matter again a tenth of a second or fifty years later, whichever is desired.

Some peculiar things could result from such a discovery. For example, it might then be found that a man could live on the Moon and commute back and forth to work in less time than he could living in the country, over the horizon from his place of employment. Or it might be found that regular airlines from New York to Los Angeles with travel time of five or six hours would be competing with cosmic-drive liners that bounce off the Moon and make the trip from New York to Los Angeles in less than a minute.

Then, so far as travel time is concerned, a man living in Flushing, New York, might better work in Burbank, California, than in Manhattan!

Not long ago in a science-fiction magazine there was an editorial which brought out the fact that the jet stovepipe, if picked up by someone in a civilization that knew nothing of its principle of operation, would be a meaningless contraption. It doesn't even begin to function until it's travelling at speeds greater than were possible a century ago. When I read that I put it away in the back of my mind. When a certain confidential report arrived on my desk a few weeks ago, I remembered that item.

This confidential report concerned the flying discs. The pertinent part was a statement to the effect that no machinery capable of producing a thrust or of otherwise generating flight was found on them.

That made me think of the analogy of a Nineteenth-Century scientific board looking blankly at a jet stove-

pipe capable of driving an airplane. It also made me think of a science fiction story I read a few years ago that was about a house filled with automatic gadgets that appeared to be nothing but paint on the walls, designs in the wallpaper, etc.

In all probability the machinery that drives a flying saucer wouldn't be recognized as such even by the most learned of scientists today. It might be that our technicians couldn't even reproduce it if they knew its details, nor understand how it operates if it were explained by those who know.

But this I know: that in the past fifty years we have climbed from almost total ignorance of science and technology to a high point, and that the curve of progress is still going up steeply. Where less than a thousand men spent less than a million dollars on research in 1900, a hundred thousand men spent billions on research in 1949 in the United States alone. This spirit of research has become like water soaking into a blotter, and in the next fifty years will almost certainly soak all of the blotter of cosmic mystery until very few corners will remain dry and untouched.

* * *

MY SECOND pocket book, "Worlds Within", is on the stands; and will be for another week or two. It's a Century Pocket Book, so if you can't find it, you can order it from Century Publications, 139 N. Clark St., Chicago 2, Ill. My contract with Century calls for five more this year, so about every other month one will be coming out. Each will be a fifty to fifty-five thousand word novel.

It's a funny thing about "Worlds Within". I got my story opening. More often than not I dream up a nice, imagination-catching opening, and build

a story from that without knowing where it's going. This time I had a guy in his apartment, shaving; when someone banged on the door in the hall. Before he could answer the door a beautiful blonde comes rushing into his apartment and slams the door, locking it. Two bad villains start breaking the door down, so she drops out of sight right through the floor. These guys break in in time to see her vanish, and take a running leap, pulling at parachute ripcords, so that as they sink through the solid floor their parachutes are starting to billow open.

Well, I go on from there, until whattaya know, I've got a nice set-up that accounts for Charles Fort, Richard S. Shaver, Merritt, and more things than I could possibly bring out! Even if you aren't interested in those things, if you're a gorgeous blonde who would like to break into some nice guy's apartment, or if you're a nice guy who would like a gorgeous blonde to break into your apartment—What? You wouldn't? How old are you? Well, even *you* will find *something*.

* * *

In the next issue there'll be a big review of the fan group, The Spectator Amateur Press Association, and their mailing which I have on hand. You're in for a real treat. The SAPS, as they have deliberately invited themselves to be called, are far from being saps. They are healthy-minded fans with a yen for publishing. The S.A.P.S. is formed along the lines of The Fantasy Amateur Press Association, (FAPA), with limited membership and all members required to contribute their own efforts to the bundle of fanzines regularly sent out to each member.

When everyone gets to read how

much fun the SAPS are having together there won't even be room on the waiting list for you, so if you want to get in, you'd better write to Art Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Michigan, right away and tell him you want to join, and get the details.

And now for the reviews of the fanzines. By now most of you have sent for and received at least one fanzine or other. Any of you newcomers who haven't are really missing something if you don't. Fandom is a world within, and one that you will enjoy getting acquainted with

* * *

ETAION SHRDLU: 5c, 3/25c; Stephen Taller, 40 West 77th St., New York 24, N.Y. Vol. 1, No. 1 of the Mid Manhattan Science Fiction Society publication. Twenty-six pages of mimeoed material covering fiction, articles and poetry. One of the highlights of this issue is "ASTOUNDING Through The Ages" by Stephen Taller. This article is prefaced by the following note: "The opinions expressed in the following article are not necessarily those of the rest of the editorial staff. In fact, the author is now in hiding." The poetry corner in this zine is devoted almost entirely to limericks, a fact which I am sure will interest most fans. If the title of this fanzine intrigues you, send your nickel to Stephen Taller, and carefully scrutinize the P.S. appended to the editorial which explains the mystery.

* * *

SCIENTIFANTASY: 20c. Bill Droll, 1031 & John Grossman, 1037 West 18th, Des Moines, Iowa. "Fandom's Prozone". This trim little photo-offset mag is one that it's publishers can well be proud of. In addition to the latest installment of "Galaxy Excozela", we have fiction, cartoons, and the article "Poetry's Place In The Fanzine" by Norm Storer. Norm divides fanzine poetry into three main classes, and offers a few suggestions on how to get good poetry for the zines, and eliminate some of the poorer selections.

* * *

MUTANT: 10c, 3/25c; bi-monthly; Michigan Science Fantasy Society; William James, P.O. Box 14, Big Bay, Michigan. Among the articles in this issue is one by Evan H. Appelman, **HOMO SAPIEN: MATHEMATICAL IMPOSSIBILITY**, putting forth the theory that Man is an evolutionary mistake that, for the good of the universe, should never have happened. And if you've been having some rather realistic nightmares lately, you might find the

answer in Norman Ashfield's story "Only a Dream?"

* * *

NEBULA: 12/\$1; monthly; Warren Baldwin, 407 Philip Ave., Norfolk, Nebr. The editorial in this first issue of the mag gets things moving, and Art Rapp keeps up the pace with his article "Same Old Groove". Art points out a few reasons why we might not feel so out of place after all if we were suddenly dropped out of a time machine into the future. For the fiction field, we have the first installments of one two-part serial and one serial which will stretch through five or six more issues.

* * *

SHIVERS: 10c; Andrew Macura, 230 Prince St., Bridgeport 8, Conn. If you like the macabre, Macura gives you your money's worth. In among these poems and stories of horror, H. S. Weatherby presents a good share of chills and thrills in the feature story "Tea Time", which should warn you to beware of these "sweet and maternal" girls unless you're tired of living. Among the poems, "Night Scene" by Jack Cuthbert is a good candidate for first place, in my opinion.

* * *

SLANT: Walter A. Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Four issues of Slant for one prozine. The Spring 1950 issue has some prominent names on the contents page, including E. Everett Evans and Forrest J. Ackerman. For a welcome twist to the usual "virtue triumphant" theme, we unconditionally recommend "The Swordsmen of Varnis" by Geoffrey Cobbe.

* * *

SPACEWARP: 15c, 2/25c 9/\$1; Art Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Michigan. Art, as usual, has gathered quite a bit of good material together making it difficult to single any one item out for special attention. However, everyone to their own taste, and my favorite was "Trouble with Teddy" by Charles Hames. All I can say is "Hey, Charlie, how do I go about getting trouble like that?" Such trouble should happen to every author.

* * *

BLOOMINGTON NEWS LETTER: Bob Tucker, P. O. Box 260, Bloomington, Illinois. Bob announces that No. 14, the December issue, will be the last appearance under the name Bloomington News Letter. Hereafter it will be known as the **SCIENCE-FICTION NEWS LETTER**, which is a more appropriate name. Bob's account of the Michigan stf group blow-up will be of interest to all fans who have been working to prove that stf fans can be sane.

* * *

JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: 25c, \$2.25 per year. Wayne Proell, 10630 S. St. Louis Ave., Chicago 43, Illinois. A technical journal, published monthly by the Chicago Rocket Society. Contains reviews and discussions of all phases of space travel, and a report of the news and

events of the Society. The December issue features articles on **HIGH ENERGY CHEMICAL ROCKET FUELS** and **ROCKET ABSTRACTS**, both by Norman Bowman.

SPACE MAGAZINE: 25c, 4/\$1; published quarterly. Clyde T. Hanbuck, 62 3rd St., N.W., Washington 1, D.C. Published by the American Rocket Association, Vol. 1, No. 1 contains a special feature, "The Science of Science Fiction" by none other than John W. Campbell, Jr. In his comprehensive article Campbell covers stf from the "way back when" of Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* up through the present time.

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c, 12/\$1; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing, New York. We have on hand both the first and second December issues of this bi-monthly fanzine. If you want to keep up with the latest happenings in fandom, it'll be worth your while to subscribe to F-T. Jimmy gives you up to the minute information on book releases, authors, stf in radio and movies, and news of what fans here and abroad are doing. The first December issue contains an article by Don Ford on "Fandom's Marshall Plan" for sending books and magazines to England and Australia. Arthur Jean Cox, in the second Dec. issue, presents a well-written account of his visit to the set of "Destination Moon" with Forry Ackerman and R. A. Heinlein. This movie, according to Lester Mayer, Jr.'s "Fantasy Films, Radio and TV" column, is only one of an impressive list of fantasy films now in preparation in Hollywood.

WASHINGTON NEWS LETTER: Chich Derry, 6604 Allegheny Avenue, Takoma Park, Maryland. Published semi-monthly by the Exterminator Press, this mimeoed news letter is a rather thorough round-up of the news and views of the WSFA. In the second issue quite a bit of space is devoted to some strong comments anent the ARA and its fanzine, **SPACE MAGAZINE**. Also, April 30th is date announced for the Washington D.C. **DISCLAVE**. For more information on this conclave, write to Derry.

SPACESHIP: 5c, 8/35c; Robert Silverberg and Saul Diskin, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N.Y. A run-down of the contents page reveals this issue contributors as Charles L. Morris, James Lewis, Selwyn Roberts and Alan M. Grant, plus your editors, Bob and Saul. Bob Silverberg's "Evolution of a Fan" caught our eye, and started us to attempt classifying some of the fans we know. As Bob sees it there are three main types of fans: The Exuberant Youthful Fan, the Awakening Fan, and the Veteran Fan, who's parting words are "A few more years and I'll be dead, thank Gh." How

about it, which classification fits you?

VALHALLA: Ed Cox, 4 Spring St., Lubec, Maine. Official organ of **YOUNG FANDOM**, distributed free to all members. This issue contains a story by Bill Calabrese, "A Visit With Lord Biscuitbottom", and club information of interest to the members of YF. There is a message from President Rick Sneary, a report from the secretary-treasure and a list of the new members.

OPERATION FANTAST: 15c, 6/75c; Captain K. F. Slater, 13 G.P. R.P.C. B.A.O.R., 23, c/o G.P.O., England. Published quarterly. A neat, professional magazine presenting fiction, poetry, articles, and efficient coverage of stf news here and in England. Two items that I want to mention here were a "Filler article" on sure-fire witch protection, and the story **ROAD**, by Sandy Laurence. I'm sure all fans will be relieved to hear, according to Mr. Laurence, that stf fans are far from welcome in Satan's establishment. Can we count on that, Sandy?

THE TALISMAN: 20c, 6/\$1; Roy W. Loan, Jr., P.O. Box 3224 Columbia Heights Station, Washington, D. C. A well-written, nicely reproduced, 23 page fanzine devoted for the most part to articles, occasionally publishing fiction. The contents page boasts the names of Philip N. Bridges, Roy W. Loan, D. R. Smith and William H. Evans in this first issue. With space travel just around the corner, the article "What's The Name?" by Bridges provides useful information as to the correct names of planets, their satellites, and inhabitants, if any. For instance, after reading this article, you won't make the mistake of calling the inhabitants of Venus Venusians or Venutians; the correct term is Venerian. In a like manner, we are living on the planet Tellus, hence we are Tellurians. Send for your copy of *The Talisman* and be prepared when space travel arrives.

THE FANTASY ATTIC: Walter A. Coslet, P.O. Box 6, Helena, Montana. This adzine is sent free to all who write in for it. Coslet has about 1500 duplicate British and American prozines, plus duplicate books and fanzines which he will trade or sell. In the *Fantasy Attic* he lists the items he needs for his collection, which he will buy or trade for. He also lists a part of the duplicates he has available, with prices, so send for your copy of *The Fantasy Attic*, or send your "want list" to Coswal and he'll do his best to fill your order.

EUSIFANSO: D. R. Fraser, Box 161, Eugene, Oregon. Mimeoed fanzine published by the Eugene Science Fantasy Society; semi-monthly, featuring articles, poetry, and stf news. Currently running a series of articles by Edward L. Zimmerman entitled "One Science Fiction Fan's View of the Bible" in which he explains how

various inexplicable biblical happenings could be accounted for by bringing airplanes, atom bombs and other products of present-day civilization. Also, in each issue the Mugwump Tree sets forth his peculiar views on any and all subjects.

MUTANT: 10c, 3/25c, 6/50c; William James, P.O. Box 14, Big Bay, Michigan. Published bi-monthly by the Michigan Science-Fantasy Society; send subscriptions to George H. Young, 22180 Middlebelt Road, Farmington, Michigan. Mimeoced;

interior illustrations by Trev Nelson and William James, cover by Rick Sneary. Fans have the reputation of accepting the unusual without much more than batting an eyelash, but I wonder if any of us could calmly accept the presence of a real, live BEM as a fellow fan. Professor Jammer-vollster, in Bill Groover's story "Mutant" seems to take Joe the BEM as a matter of course, but then—the Professor writes fanzines, and that explains almost everything.

—ROG PHILLIPS

WORLD WITHOUT MEN

by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

(CONCLUDED FROM PAGE 85).

ferent from any of the rest."

"Only—"

"And you're going to get one." He caught her in his arms, held her, kissed her. It was the first time such a thing had ever happened to Helen Five. For an instant she was outraged, for a moment she tried to fight, then as powerful impulses rose in her, impulses that she had not known existed, little by little the will to resistance faded.

In the roaring tumult coming from the city, Bartlett found she was kissing him back. Calmly he picked her

up, began to carry her. Her apartment was over that way somewhere, as he remembered it. If it had been destroyed, it didn't matter much. The night was warm and there was still the park.

A sound came from behind him. He turned. It was Ed Gast. The trooper was carrying the blonde policewoman.

"I got this one for mine," the trooper shouted. "Which way to the park, brother? Which way to the park?"

The masters had come back to the world. And the mistresses were glad of it.

FREEDOM FROM THINKING

By MILTON MATTHEW

A FAVORITE question of students, one which they never seem to tire of is, "what is the greatest single discovery in the world?" Naturally it is impossible to give any one answer to that though it often takes a while to learn that. But some broad general ideas can be gotten by considering those things which have most strongly changed men's way of living.

The discovery and utilization of electric power freed Man from physical labor. While it is still true that this is not so all over the world as it is in the industrialized United States, it is on its way and we can already see the time when all physical labor, no matter what it is, will be done by electric-motor powered machines.

The second—and even more revolutionary change in men's living—is just now in the process of development. For the discovery of the three-element vacuum tube is eventually going to free men from the tedious processes of routine thinking. With the growth of industry, a tremendous amount of accounting and bookkeeping, record-storing and recording is necessary.

Almost as many people are engaged in clerical work as in productive work. But this is going to change with the advances of the "mechanical brains."

The years between the First and Second World Wars saw that the possibilities of the vacuum tube were thoroughly explored. Radio, communications, basic television—all were worked out. The War brought radar and remote control devices, along with electronic calculating machines.

Now that these things are understood, we are exploiting them. We are making use of the unlimited possibilities that are offered to us. The vacuum tube, in many ways, is more important to us than the atomic bomb, for it is the magic key with which we open the treasury of knowledge.

The fact is that Man is on the verge of re-creating himself—not the biological duplication of protoplasm, nor yet the metallic robotic monster of science-fiction. His image will be considerably simpler—certainly different. It can be honestly said that the "thinking machine" is on its way—in fact, may be here already.

The Reader's FORUM



A DIM FUTURE FOR STF?

Sir:

No doubt if you look in the "J" section of the files, or reader comment, during that Shaver fiasco, you will note quite some material that I sent in at that time. Reason for mentioning same is to let you know that I have been a steady customer of AMAZING STORIES magazine since the first issue was printed.

The future of science fiction is indeed dim, unless authors are found with some real imagination; for cold everyday science has nearly managed to make practically every fantastic device that the poor authors could imagine in the transition days from the steam engine and the horse and buggy to the present day of atomics and internal combustion engines. True we know only static atomics; someday, the science known as dynamic atomics will dawn, then the world will be a very pleasant place in which to dwell.

For the new coming magazines, I would like to read of things that pertain to the forces that manage the destiny of us poor humans. Also, the great evolutionary forces that force changes in races and all other creation, what are these; and why do they exist.

Alchemy, and the older sciences, would make interesting story material if a real author could be found. Rog Phillips is definitely not the type; he leaves too many unanswered gaps. He did write some good stuff from the material standpoint, but he does not complete the picture.

McGivern's story "The Galaxy Raiders" is too much Foreign Legion and the military cadet type of story. He apparently knows nothing of deep space. Shaver is wiser along these lines.

Also, it seems wrong to end every story "they lived happily ever after"—also why wreck the hero's future by marrying him off? I went to the picture here in town of the "Red Shoes", a ballet. It was made in England, and the picture ended in tragedy. Life is many times tragic. Let us be realistic. For a change that picture was most interesting. Science fiction could have learned much from some of the scenes in that production.

The small articles with bits of info about new science progress are very in-

teresting, provided they do not make another "Mechanix Illustrated" out of AMAZING.

If another writer such as H. P. Lovecraft could be discovered get him and pay him all the traffic will bear. He'd be worth it.

"The Pranksters" by Rog Phillips was very interesting. For once he did complete a story, but one swallow does not make a summer, so tell him to hit the ball.

Good luck for the New Year. I hope to read a bigger and better book of AMAZING STORIES, provided some authors can be found.

Edward John
475 Fell Street
San Francisco 2, Cal.

Comment on a portion of this letter appears on this month's editorial page.—Ed.

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS

Dear Mr. Browne:

Lately AMAZING STORIES hasn't been up par. And it could be a lot better. Following enclosed are a few suggestions that I hope you will take into consideration.

1) Where's your letter dept.? A good stf magazine isn't a real stf magazine without one. A letter dept. brings the readers together.

2) Your stories—some are O.K. But none is unusual. Take E. E. Smith's famous Skylark and Lensman series, Edgar Rice Burrough's Tarzan and Martian series, Binder's Adam Link stories, and hundreds of others. But where are they now? Burroughs is out but I believe Binder and Smith can still write. And where are some of your stories? They were good.

3) The art... Not so bad. Krupa, Terry, and St. John are very good. So is Paul and Finley. Where are they? The Feb. cover has the best idea displayed for a long time. A St. John cover is always good—so is Paul and Finley. Another thing, some of these fan artists are head over heels better than some of the pro artists. I think Grossman, Waible, and Eaton are as good as they come.

4) The paper your mag. is printed on—Aggggh, and I'm not gargling. Where

(Continued On Page 184)

FIND YOUR SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS

Thru your name vibrations

HAPPY MARRIAGES AND DIVORCES

Are the outer results of the vibrations of your name.

Parents when you name your children, do you know what vibrations you are putting into action in their lives?

Read the new Sensational

"HEQUAZ ODD NAME BOOK"

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The most unusual book of its kind, will open up a new field of interest to you.

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Entitles you to a beautiful certificate to hang on your wall.

Something you will be proud to show your friends.

A free list of 50 names to begin your collection, and every three months the addresses of members all over the country will be sent you. So you can either exchange or sell your names to other members. This membership also makes you eligible to enter the ODD NAME COLLECTING CONTEST that starts March 1, 1950 and ends September 1, 1950. Names of winners will be published.

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NAME.....

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All winners will be notified by return mail.

Sponsored by "HEQUAZ CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL OF NUMEROLOGY."

THE READER'S FORUM

HOLD ON TO THE ARTICLES!

(Continued From Page 182)

the heck are the trimmed edges?

5) Why not start the back cover paintings again, only by Paul, Finley and St. John instead of just Paul?

6) I must compliment the CLUB HOUSE. It's the best thing you've got and it does a wonderful job on playing the stf conventions up. Keep Phillips.

I speak not only for myself but for a lot of my friends and I hope you won't let us down by not improving AMAZING STORIES. Thanks.

Jim Bradley
545 N.E. San Rafael
Portland 12, Oregon

We're seeking to go beyond even the present-day brand of science-fiction. The answer to that would hardly be for us to use the type of story in vogue fifteen or twenty years ago. Actually, were the stories of the "good old days" really as good as nostalgia may have led us into believing?

—Ed.

IS SEX NECESSARY?

Dear Mr. Browne:

I am glad to see that steps have been taken to break down the barrier once separating AMAZING'S writers from the others in the stf field. This division was unhealthy for all concerned. I look forward with eager anticipation to the stories by Abernathy (definitely NOT a newcomer to stf) and Temple next issue. However, this should be only a small step in the rehabilitation of AMAZING.

Also, there is the matter of sex. Stf fans have learned to tolerate sexy covers as a necessary evil. But when the sex invades the stories and inside illos, it's a different matter. Stf stories have no place for sex. Fans will not read a fantascience-sex magazine.

Of course, nobody expects you to pull AS out of the muck in a matter of months. There is much to be done, and I wish you all the success in the world in doing a bang-up job of it.

Morton D. Paley
1455 Townsend Avenue,
New York 52, N.Y.

We have no intention of putting out a "fantascience-sex magazine". Illustrations are based on scenes written into a story by the author—and we don't tell the author what to put in, or leave out, of his work....

But once again, let's learn what our readers have to say about the kind of illustration you object to.

—Ed.

Dear Sir:

Just bought February issue of AMAZING STORIES and I want to express my thoughts on the articles other than the stories. The idea of presenting features that show possible life in the future is fine. But I've always liked AMAZING STORIES because the articles usually were fact and not just supposition. Articles by Ley and others for example. These articles kept us (the average person that doesn't read scientific literature) informed as to modern discoveries and new methods in science, medicine, etc. For those of us who have been science-fiction fans for years, it has been a great pleasure to read of a modern discovery, or use of something new we read about, merely as a story, fifteen years ago.

I'd hate to see those articles and others that deal with the past ages' mysteries go neglected. I feel the stories are entertaining enough and show enough future ideas to satisfy most. The other future features come to me only as anti-climaxes to the story and present no variety.

I've been reading science fiction for over fifteen years and have never written a letter or joined a club. I am merely a reader who is very entertained with science fiction and I like nearly all of the stories I read. An author might come out with only a fair story sometimes, but nearly all the writers produce entertaining stories mostly. I read the letters in nearly all the magazines and see that a large majority must read just to criticize style, ideas, art, etc. and not to be entertained. After all, a writer, painter, musician, actor, etc. are in professions that produce works for the enjoyment of the people. Some are better than others, naturally, but if a person wants to be entertained he can be by enjoying what's given him and not try to tear it apart. The best of things is lost to a large amount of people because they set one high standard and refuse to even tolerate anything less.

Enough of that, but more science-fiction stories. More new authors, all the old, and above all, modern articles with information of today's scientific happenings and good luck with your new job.

Stan Peates
The Hill Hotel
Omaha, Nebraska

A READER LOOKS AT THE FIELD

Dear Mr. Browne:

Science fiction has passed its infancy stage. Having weathered all obstacles it is now passing into the adolescent period. It has already added a new and thrilling chapter to literature. America started this movement, and was swiftly followed by England and Canada. Like all types of literature science fiction has its standards. A careful study of material written by

(Concluded On Page 193)



KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

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HOLLYWOOD ON THE MOON!

By

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

"LIGHTS! Camera! Action!"

A jet black backdrop is suddenly ablaze with stars—green stars, because white light would give a reddish halation in technicolor, and **DESTINATION MOON** is being filmed on a spectromatic scale.

A score of lights illuminate the silvery skin of the fish of space—the 150 foot rocket that is flashing thru the interplanetary void to its filmatic destination: Moon!

And the action starts as a space-suited figure detaches itself from the shell of the ship and flounders frantically in the ether.

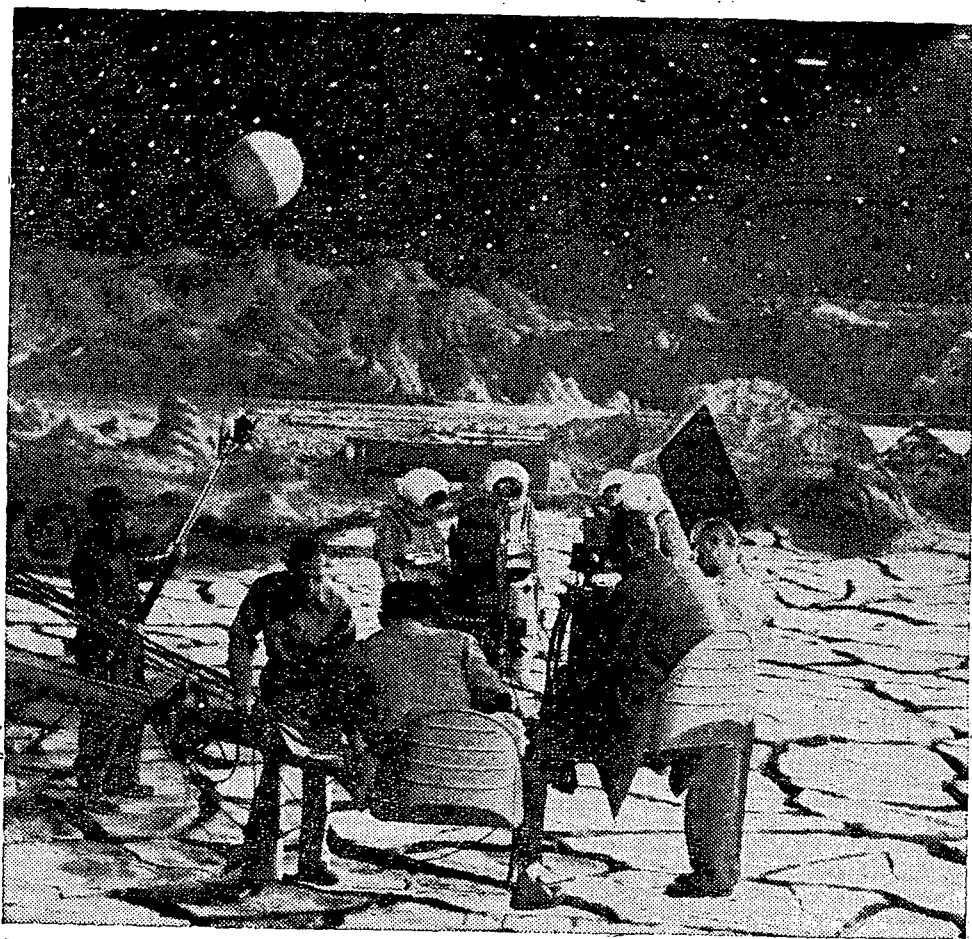
"Wait a minute! Hold it!" A voice knifes thru the stillness of the sound set. It is the voice of famous scientfictioneer

Robert Heinlein, author of the script and technical advisor on the film. "Who's smoking?" he calls out.

"Kill that cigaret!" commands the director. For what would a lazy haze of burning tobacco be doing, drifting around in oxygenless space?

This is but one of the problems in one of the 150 scenes that make up this documentary of 1960 known as **DESTINATION MOON**, the film the experts are prophesying will start a scientifilm cycle in Hollywood. Producer Geo. Pal is already ready to follow it up with the spectacle of the destruction of the world in Balmer-Wylie's tremendous **WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE**, after which the famous classic, **RALPH 124C41** plus, will be among the

(Concluded On Page 188)





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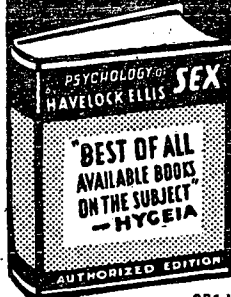
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HOLLYWOOD ON THE MOON

(Concluded From Page 186)

screen possibilities he will consider.

Every fan will be delighted to learn that every effort is being expended to make **DESTINATION MOON** a serious, non-serial sort of picture. There will be no girl stowaway, no bungling comedian, no bug-eyed monsters on the Moon. A straight-forward story is being filmed of man's conquest of space, aided and abetted by the astronomical artistry of Chesley Bonestell, who has designed the moonscape with a meticulousness that is amazing. I have stood in that crater of Harpolus and felt that I was 240,000 miles from Earth!

For the first time in 2 decades—since the pioneer German effort, "Die Frau im Mond", and the Martian musicomedy, "Just Imagine"—interplanetary enthusiasts will be able to experience the vicarious (and precarious!) thrills of a leap into space.

Come with me a few months hence to a darkened theater. You stare enthralled as the mighty atomic-powered 3-stage rocket rises from the earth on a column of flame. You sink back in your seat as you mirror the emotions of the explorers on the screen, gasping for breath as the inexorable hand of gravity crushes you at 6g's. On a Hohmann orbit you speed spaceward at 7 miles a second. The next thing you know you are floating out of your seat and standing on your head, as gravity is nullified. Terror clutches your heart as you are separated from the rocket and grasp futilely for some support.

You are suddenly brought back to earth by a loud "ouch!" in your ear. You have grabbed hold of the arm of the patron next to you!

THE END

THE OBSERVATORY

(Continued From Page 6)

FORTUNATELY for most stf publica-
tions today, as in the past, there is a
considerable number of readers who don't
care what happens as long as it happens on
Mars. But the genre, we think, is rapidly
finding a more critical audience, and if
it is to take on any permanent stature at
all, its sights must be raised considerably.

THIS editor is not contending that no
fine stories have been written in the
field. But for every jewel such as, say,
Anthony Boucher's *Mr. Lepescu*, we can
show you a hundred hunks of glass. Yes;
of course there are capable, conscientious
and intelligent writers of fantasy and sci-
ence-fiction. But these make up only a mea-
ger handful of talent in comparison to the
legion of uninspired hacks banging out
reams of the stuff and—even worse—sell-
ing it. Selling it because editors must fill
their magazines even though they hold a

blue pencil with one hand and their noses with the other!

FORTUNATELY the picture is not altogether black. Comparative newcomers such as Robert Abernathy, Mack Reynolds and Kris Neville, among others, are doing much to raise the standards of science-fiction and fantasy. But the crying need is not fine writing alone. What is desperately needed is a NEW conception of story—in short, NEW PLOTS! Variations on an old theme are not enough. Stories packed with a plethora of science and pseudo-science are not enough. Out-and-out adventure on other planets and in obscure or non-existent galaxies has lost much of its appeal. Tales of fourth-dimensional horror are no longer effective; even Junior, thanks to television, can walk up to a ghost and spit in its eye.

WE CAN'T tell an author what can be written in these fields that has never been done before. If we knew, we'd write it ourselves. But this we can say to the writer who fills the bill: if you want to be buried in penthouses and valets and pink pearls, all you have to do is come up with the "something NEW" we've been talking about. We know of at least one publishing house that will supply all those luxuries in exchange!

—HB

THE END

WHAT LIES AHEAD

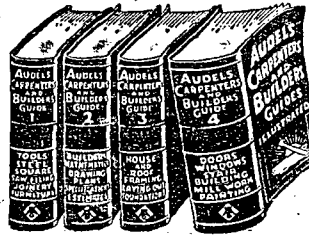
By SANDY MILLER

WITH THIS celebration of the mid-century, the news reports blossom out with optimistic prophecy and portent. But the heavy blanket of censorship that lied over the most interesting developments in the world, nullifies this. We want to know what's coming, but the omnipresent threat of war and destruction unfortunately prevents us from more than guessing.

But it doesn't take a Biblical prophet to know what's in the offing in spite of the censorship and restrictions. We would sell our souls to get a glimpse into the magic of rocket wizardry that is undoubtedly being done at a dozen places in the United States and who knows how many other places in the world. For it is a certainty that great successes are being achieved. The only reports we receive are about how high this-or-that rocket went the other day. And then we don't know how old that commentary is.

For all we know they may well be on the way toward shooting the first projectile Lunar-wards! We science-fictionists are so accustomed to strange things, that we've lost a good deal of our ability to exhibit child-like wonder at that great event.

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WRONG ANSWER

By

CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

THE COMPUTER Room at the Guided Missiles Research Institute at Seahawken is not a particularly impressive place. And neither are its members. Most of the operators are brilliant young men, absent-minded and wholly devoted to the esoteric mysteries of the "brains" under their control—except for the weekends when they like to go out and get drunk just like anybody else.

My paper sent me down to Seahawken to get the dope on a suicide case that happened over one of those lazy summer weekends. Before I'd been in town an hour I knew the Security men had cased me so thoroughly they knew me down to the last cavity in my eye-teeth.

When I finally got into the offices and talked with the director, I learned nothing but that a technician, a Doctor Julius Wynward had been despondent and had committed suicide. I was given this information cordially and the public relations officer tsK-tsked and said it was too bad. "These scientists are under such strain, you know..."

"Well," I asked, "what caused the suicide? What was the actual reason? He must have had one."

The officer shrugged. He tapped his head. "You know these crazy geniuses. They go off the deep end every now and then." He handed me a typewritten outline of Wynward's brief life and signified that our little talk was over.

But I wasn't satisfied. It seemed that there was something more. I'd have to do a little scouting on my own.

I ended up at the bar of the Flamingo, the hotel, that afternoon and it wasn't long before I managed to get into a conversation with a tall thin man who was nursing a tall thin drink.

One thing led to another and soon we were exchanging the usual conversational chit-chat. He was a computer scientist too but when I mentioned Wynward, he clamped up like a fish. I didn't mention the suicide again until we were both feeling pretty mellow. Then he began to talk—after he'd drawn me to a side booth.

He puffed nervously on a cigarette.

When he started to talk he sounded almost like a guilty boy instead of a competent scientist.

"...Wynward," he said, "was a good man. But like all of us, he spent too much time with that damn machine. Computers are funny things. They're almost alive and when a man deals with a living machine, it gets him after a while. Even Wynward."

I didn't say anything but let the man talk. He said that Wynward was doing some conventional research on projectiles, most of which required him to feed prob-

lems to the machine and take answers out. He used a lot of technical gobbledeegook but I got the general pitch.

"Monday afternoon," the scientist went on, "Wynward was working as usual. He ran into a rather tough problem and he kept the mechanical 'brain' humming. Finally he shot a very critical complex problem into the keyboard, gave the machine power and waited some twenty minutes for the answer to appear on the usual teletypewriter output. The answer came out all right."

Here the man pulled a small scrap of paper from his pocket and began toying with it. His hands were shaking.

"Wynward read the answer—up until where it stopped—it was just a chain of numbers, coded and complex which would have to be changed to the decimal form.

"But the answer broke off abruptly—and there were some words on the paper!"

The scientist took another pull at his drink and tossed the scrap of paper to me. I unfolded it. Most of it was a maze of numbers in nice even rows and columns, and so far as I was concerned utterly incomprehensible. But in the middle of sheet the numbers had stopped and there was a sentence!

My eyes did a double-take. I had to realize that this paper was the output of a mechanical brain, a computing machine into which one fed problems and from which answer should come. But this sentence was impossible. Machines don't write English.

It said: *What is life?*

I shuddered.

"See what I mean?" the scientist asked. "Wynward read this, showed it to me a few hours later. I knew he was shocked and I tried to tell him that someone must have played a practical joke. But he knew that even I didn't believe that. He went to his room and shot himself. That's all."

He got up, staggering a little, and started to walk away. He paused for a moment, turned and looked at me. "I'm quitting today." Then walked away.

I sat there staring at the scrap of paper. I took a deep drink. And somehow I knew that the end wasn't coming through an A-bomb or an H-bomb. The evil was crawling out of the computing laboratories.

My story said "nervous strain causes young scientist to commit suicide." But it's getting so bad I hate to use even a slot machine for a handful of peanuts. It might be thinking...

THE TOMB TAPPERS

By LEO BRADY

THE ANNOUNCEMENT was made quietly. Video commentators mentioned it briefly and newspapers located it in the back pages. Nor did it say much. But it implied a lot.

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is reinstated. This change has been made by the Chief Executive upon the advice of the Triplanetary Council."

What a tale of complexity and intrigue revolves around that statement! It requires the tracing of a section of interplanetary history. Forty years ago when Man was spreading through the Solar System—some say like a plague!—lawlessness and disorder hit a new peak as is almost always the case when unfettered pioneering expansion takes place. And because the Solar System is so vast men—many of them—assumed crime would be a source of easy pickings—and it was. In the vast reaches of the system what was to prevent piracy and robbery, murder and treachery? Nothing of course, and so crime blossomed.

Finally things became so bad, with spacecraft hardly daring to make a simple Lunar hop without a military escort, that the Tri-Planets clamped down with an enormous organization of security police armed to the teeth and on the continual hunt for pirates and lawbreakers.

But it was when the Triplanetary Council devised regulation or Public Law 103, that the campaign against lawlessness had its real effect.

The law stated that any persons involved in piracy or interplanetary crime were to be executed. This severe punishment carried a death sentence of horror. The criminal was placed in a metal cylinder of shining white, equipped with facilities for living almost indefinitely. He was shot into space to die alone. To permit him to die by his own hand if he so desired, a pistol was given him. Entombed in his little coffin, he drifted through the System eventually into the outer reaches of the limits.

This horrible fate actually had the effect of deterring crime and criminals. Only those who have been in the vastness of space can appreciate the hideousness of such a death, the utter abysmal loneliness, the despair and fear. This apparently inhumane punishment brought results however. Crime dropped off rapidly as the law was put into effect.

But unfortunately it worked only for a time which is why the announcement of the rescinding of Law 103 was made. Pirates began making a point of tracking down and rescuing the occupants of the doomed cylinder, adding to their crews.

And so, right now, the Solar System stands in a position of great danger. Pirate activities will multiply manifold. It would seem that crime is almost becoming an organized system of its own rather than a phenomenon of the socially maladjusted.

We don't know how the System Patrol will combat the new danger, but it will. A terrific fight lies ahead though, since even the threat of such a horrible fate as that provided by law one oh three has been unable to eliminate the danger of crime throughout the System...

THE READER'S FORUM

★
(Concluded From Page 184)

leading S-F authors will prove that almost all basic details are the same. These codes of writing are temporary, changing with the times. But the more knowledge we acquire, the more stationary these standards become.

When science fiction is mentioned, it is immediately linked with space and interplanetary travel. This cites a very good example of S-F standards. To begin with, a rocket ship (which is practically in every story concerning deep space) is usually propelled by atomic power. The ship is so huge that it requires an immense crew. Such trivia as ray guns, death beams, ozone rays, and atomic weapons are taken for granted.

Most authors who create space stories have beings from other planets mingle with earthmen. These creatures usually croak, lisp, or whisper when they talk. It is a fictitious fact that a man from Terra is a weakling compared to people from other planets. A Martian will have eight arms or four eyes. A Jovian will be colored green and have six legs, while a Plutonian will have two heads and a Venusian ten senses. In mentality man makes up for these deficiencies by being a mental superior. This fact is stressed by many authors. It is an astro-physical fact that the moon is airless and can sustain no life. The authors have taken advantage of this in the space-suit and underground city.

Science fiction is a large field in which generalization is virtually impossible. It has many different specialized fields and therefore needs specialists. Some authors only write on the atom, while others on adventures in time and dimension. Space, however, is the backbone of science-fiction authors for it is the most written about field. The conquering of the Solar System is both man's dream and problem and he is grasping for the solution. And after our system the stars, and after that teleporation.

Science fiction is only a glimpse of the future. Today's newest ideas will be obsolete tomorrow. Man will not, cannot change his future. Science fiction is no prophecy of the future. Or is it?

Oscar Oliviant
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Your observations are pertinent, but where do you go from there? Perhaps our editorial reply to Edward John's letter in this issue ties in with your own letter.

—Ed.

THE END

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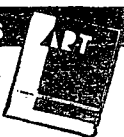
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MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

(Concluded From Page 43)

He turned on the intercom and called Marsden. Without waiting for a reply he gave instructions. Marsden acknowledged, nothing more. Greg began to laugh. He was thinking of Mars again. Of the low red hills he had seen so often in dreams. Of the cobalt sky where the stars shone night and day—

"Greg! Greg!" Elna's voice came through the intercom, but faintly. "Greg! Where are you?"

He did not answer. In his mind he could see those ancient hills. Elna was there, walking under the cloudless sky. She was free; he didn't want to spoil it. He didn't want to say that he had lied to her, that he had never intended to go with her, that the spaceship was remotely controlled and that she had to pay for her freedom with his life. Greg closed his eyes and let his head sink toward his chest. Dark shadows flickered before his eyes, but they did not dim the vision of Mars.

Elna's voice was very, very faint now. He reached out gropingly and snapped off the instrument. The Monitors were battering down the door. He didn't want Elna to hear what came next. He smiled and sank back into his dream. The crash of the door was unheard, the rattling fusillade that cut him down at the panel was unfelt.

Far above him, the spaceship reached for the stars.

THE END

Because of space limitations
ARTICLE VIII
OF
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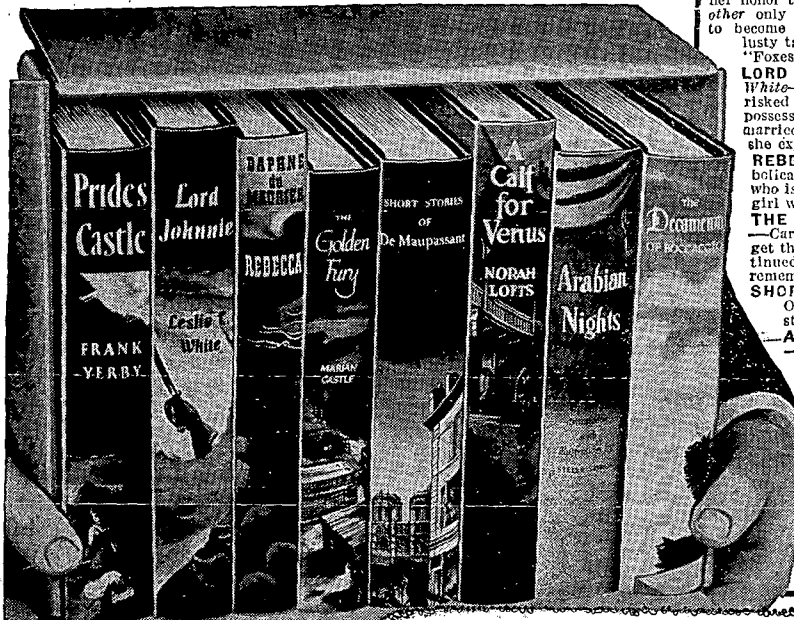
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